



# Symposium

## JOHN, JESUS, AND HISTORY, VOLUME 1 Critical Appraisals of Critical Views

*Edited by*  
Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S.J.,  
and Tom Thatcher



JOHN, JESUS, AND HISTORY, VOLUME 1:  
CRITICAL APPRAISALS OF CRITICAL VIEWS



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ACNT	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Part 2, <i>Principat</i> . Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–.
A.J.	Flavius Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i> ( <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> )
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
B.J.	Flavius Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i> ( <i>Jewish War</i> )
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FE	Fourth Evangelist
FG	Fourth Gospel
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus of Lyons, <i>Contra haereses</i> ( <i>Against Heresies</i> )
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> ( <i>History of the Church</i> )
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series

<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles and Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections for Each Book of the Bible.</i> 13 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	Novum Testamentum Supplements
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>QRT</i>	<i>Quaker Religious Thought</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RGG</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.</i> Edited by Kurt Galling. 7 vols. 3rd ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1957–65.
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBLSymS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
<i>SBT</i>	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SNTSU</i>	<i>Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt</i>
<i>Theol</i>	<i>Theologica</i>
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie.</i> Edited by Horst Robert Balz, Gerhard Krause, and Gerhard Müller. 36 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–2004.
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TTS</i>	Theologische Texte und Studien
<i>TUGAL</i>	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

## PROLOGUE: CRITICAL VIEWS OF JOHN, JESUS, AND HISTORY

*Paul N. Anderson*

For most readers of the Bible, the Gospel of John comes across as a vivid and graphic narrative, drawing the reader into the story either as a friend or foe of “the truth,” whatever that might entail. It alone claims to be rooted in eyewitness memory among the canonical Gospels, and yet it is the most different—and strikingly so. On the one hand, the Johannine perspective is cosmic, beginning with the advent of the eternal Logos and concluding with the ongoing ministry of the resurrected Jesus. How could that reflect an earth-fettered historical perspective? In between are wondrous acts of power, most of them absent from the other Gospels, and the teaching of John’s Jesus is elevated and theological, referring to himself and his work rather than diminishing his personal importance and magnifying the character of the kingdom. For these and other reasons, the prevalent scholarly opinion in the modern era has come to relegate the Johannine Gospel to the canons of myth and theology rather than history; therefore, John’s Gospel has become off-limits for historical quests for Jesus.

On the other hand, the critical view of a nonhistorical Gospel of John creates new problems that cannot be solved by the simplistic relegation of the Synoptic Gospels to “factual history” and the Johannine Gospel to “idealized theology.” John has more archaeological content and topographical detail than all the other Gospels put together. John also bears many features of historical realism that contribute a more plausible view of Jesus’ ministry than the Markan Gospels (or if Matthean priority is preferred, which most scholars do not, “the Matthean Gospels”). Further, John possesses a great deal of *mundane* and “theologically innocent” material that cannot be adequately explained on the basis of John’s inferred ahistoricity or mimetic imitations of reality. And, even as new literary readings of John have contributed greatly to appreciating *what* is being said by considering *how* it is being crafted rhetorically, the literary fact of a story claiming to be rooted in firsthand experience becomes a new challenge—literarily, if not historically. The traditional view of John’s authorship has been questioned extensively, but no other single view has taken its place critically (Anderson 1996, 1–136). Given the facts that

the greatest source-critical and redaction-critical reconstructive endeavors of the modern era have been performed on the Johannine Gospel, while at the same time failing to command broad critical assent, finally means that huge new problems accompany the modern solutions to the Johannine riddles. Yet the predominant critical paradigm in the modern era for settling Synoptic-Johannine differences tends to regard them as the “factual” and “spiritual” Gospels, respectively. So how did this set of inexact designations evolve?

In the late second century C.E., Clement of Alexandria described the distinction as follows (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14): “But, last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.” But what was Clement really saying and why did he make such a claim? Despite Arthur Cushman McGiffert’s 1890 mistranslation of τὰ σωματικά as “the facts” in the Schaff and Wace edition of the Library of the Church Fathers, a factuality-spirituality dichotomy is *not* the point Clement was making. Better put, it is a body-spirit distinction, or a somatic-pneumatic contrast he was making, which has entirely different connotations. Further, why did Clement make such a claim? Was it made as a “historically based” judgment denigrating or elevating either the Johannine or the Synoptic Gospels? Probably not. Rather, it was more likely a mere conjectural statement as to how to make sense of John’s distinctively theological and different presentation of the Jesus story and nothing more than that. Granted, this is not the only way Clement is interpreted, but a *wrong* reading of Clement cannot be taken as a basis for overturning the entire second-century testimony as to the character of the Johannine tradition (Hill 2004) any more than a *correct* reading of his declaration that Matthew and Luke were written *before* Mark (made just prior to the above passage) should be taken as overturning the well-established critical view of Markan priority. Of course, there are other problems with John’s historicity, but a facile designation of John as “spiritual versus factual,” basing itself on a flawed translation of a misunderstood statement a full century after John was written, is less than a solid foundation on which to build anything of enduring value.

Further, such a move tends to be accompanied by the following *flawed* inferences:

- ▶ Because John is clearly theological, it cannot be historical.
- ▶ Inferences regarding a tradition’s development imply knowledge of its origin.
- ▶ The rhetorical crafting of a narrative implies a fictive origin of its material.
- ▶ Historiography is invariably objective and detached, rather than subjective and personally engaged.
- ▶ Differences in perspective, inclusion, and selection force a dichotomous selection of one tradition at the expense of another.
- ▶ The Synoptic Gospels are *not* theological in character, origin, or development; *only* John is theological.

- ▶ Where the Synoptics agree against John, this implies a three-against-one decimation of John's veracity.
- ▶ Two or more Gospel traditions would not have disagreed with each other if they indeed reflect primitive historical memories.
- ▶ All authentic Jesus traditions must have agreed on all or most of the basics, as well as incidental matters; disagreement obviates either ahistoricity or error.
- ▶ Alternative perspectives and reflections on the same event or subject cannot both be historical.
- ▶ One must therefore make a disjunctive choice between the Synoptics or John in searching for Jesus, because their presentations of Jesus are radically and extensively different.
- ▶ Because Mark was finalized earliest among the Gospels, its chronology and presentation are superior to later renderings.
- ▶ Because John was finalized latest among the Gospels, its chronology and presentation are inferior to earlier renderings.
- ▶ Because the Markan Gospels are more reliable historically, they provide the essential basis for investigating the Jesus of history.
- ▶ Nearly all other ancient Christian Gospel material is suitable for conducting Jesus research, including apocryphal and gnostic writings, but not John.
- ▶ Therefore, John is fundamentally off limits for historicity and Jesus studies.

On one hand, each of these views has a good point to make; the problem comes with asserting any valid point beyond its breaking point. Further, although some of these claims overstate the matters at hand, each also gets cited as a basis for moves critical scholars currently make, and those who question these moves face the risk of being maligned as "uncritical." The question, however, is whether these are, in themselves, sound *critical* bases on which to proceed. In the demythologizing climate of the last two centuries, John has been effectively "dehistoricized," and Jesus has been likewise "de-Johannified." The critical problem with this state of affairs is that neither of these judgments stands up entirely well to ongoing tests of critical scrutiny. Effective critical analysis cuts in all directions, not just traditional ones. That being the case, the goal of this investigation is not the defense of traditional views; they will continue to be critically analyzed. Nor is it the deconstruction of critical views, although they will not be granted critical immunity. All perspectives are welcome, as long as they make critical assessments of their subject, suggesting why such a move is arguable. Privileging the above two platforms (the denial of John's historicity and thus refusing John a place at the table regarding Jesus studies) as the prevalent scholarly views, what is needed is a critical appraisal of the degree to which John, Jesus, and history are inter-related. The focus, therefore, of the present investigation is to ascertain how this might or might not be so, and why.

As a means of exploring these issues, the John, Jesus, and History Project was granted Consultation status for its first three years (2002–2004) at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings, and the essays invited for those sessions provide the contents of this book. These involve introductory, literature-review, methodological, and case-study approaches to the issues. Group status was granted for the second triennium (2005–2007), whose sessions engaged the “dehistoricization of John” critically by means of considering aspects of historicity in John 1–4; 5–12; and 13–21. For the third triennium (2008–2010), our intention is to engage critically the “de-Johannification of Jesus” by means of seeking to ascertain the degree to which historical knowledge of Jesus might be furthered by considering the passion narrative, the works of Jesus, and the words of Jesus through the Johannine lens. Papers from those sessions will be included in the two volumes following this one.

While this endeavor does not pretend to produce a new consensus, either on how to approach the issues or how to resolve them, in our opening session in November 2002 I attempted to discern a preliminary consensus, or to obtain a “sense of the meeting” at least on better questions to be asking. At that session, where over 280 scholars had packed the meeting room, eight questions reflecting the deliberations of previous discussions were posed, to which there were no objections. Further suggestions were then invited, and another eight questions were contributed from the floor. Following is the list of questions about which there seemed to be a good deal of unity as to how to proceed. While expecting unity of any sort may be unrealistic at this point, seeking to gather a sense of what questions should be asked can be at least a starting point. Convergences and divergences of understanding can then be sought, and genuinely profitable inquiry seeks a clearer understanding of *why* scholars disagree when we do.

The following questions have guided our inquiry since the beginning of this quest:

- ▶ How do we consider aspects of historicity when addressing the particular phenomenology of the Fourth Gospel?
- ▶ How do we consider interrelationships between historicity and spirituality—or between history and theology—when addressing particular and general aspects of Johannine interpretation?
- ▶ How do we retain appropriate levels of modesty in our claims—commensurate with varying degrees of certainty and appropriate to the character of the evidence in terms of implications?
- ▶ How do we consider relations between the Johannine and Synoptic traditions in ways that most adequately account for similarities and differences, and how do we make plausible inferences of potential connections and autonomies between them?
- ▶ How do we appreciate the relations between history and theology in all

four (five, granting Q?) canonical Gospel traditions, seeking to account for tensions between earlier and developing histories of respective traditions?

- ▶ How do we consider the development of Johannine material in the light of plausible literary- and community-history theories, while at the same time not eclipsing plausible considerations of John's originaive history as well?
- ▶ How do we assess the veracity and validity of our premises and syllogisms before accepting or rejecting particular claims underlying general Johannine approaches and theories?
- ▶ How do we consider particular ways aspects of the Johannine witness contribute to—or detract from—an adequate portraiture of Jesus?
- ▶ How do we make explicit our own presuppositions and investments in conducting constructive and deconstructive research, affirming the fact that these *can and should affect our questions*, while at the same time insisting that these *ought not influence the results* of our investigations?
- ▶ How do we construct our investigations in ways that draw together interdisciplinary approaches, including literary, historical, and theological analyses and their interrelationships with each other, using the best disciplines for the tasks required?
- ▶ How do we grind new lenses for assessing the Johannine riddles without being sidetracked by tools especially useful to Synoptic studies and resultant critical approaches?
- ▶ Why is this investigation an important one, and what might be the result of such an inquiry in terms of producing a more nuanced and measured set of judgments?
- ▶ How does such an inquiry benefit from new historical methodologies and even fresh understandings of what history is and why historical narratives are written, especially with implications for interpreting Gospel narratives and discourses?
- ▶ What difference does it make that the Johannine memory of Jesus is interpreted from the perspective of the Christ events and the ongoing needs of first-century Christianity?
- ▶ How does the pervasive presence of Johannine symbolism and metaphor affect effective ways of investigating Johannine historiography, while at the same time not allowing inferences of symbolization to become overly speculative and imprecise?
- ▶ What implications do the originaive and developing images of the Johannine narrative have for later generations in terms of evoking interpretations facilitative of liberating and meaningful applications?

The essays in this book attempt to make advances in addressing these questions, and they are organized into five parts. Part 1 opens with introductory matters, including a description of the John, Jesus, and History Project and an outlining of why this study is needed and why it is needed now. Part 2 conducts several

state-of-the-art reviews of the literature, including responses where appropriate. Part 3 includes several disciplinary approaches to issues of historicity in John, considering related subjects as well. Part 4 poses a case study as a way forward in the investigation, including a response designed to take the discussion further. Part 5 outlines several concluding matters, suggesting further investigations and profitable approaches to relevant issues.

One of the most intense and wide-ranging sets of controversies in the early church, especially from the fourth through the sixth centuries, involved John's contributions to how Jesus is to be understood as the Christ of faith. Indeed, John's christological tensions garnered advocates on *both sides* of many of the debates. Likewise, one of the most intense and wide-ranging sets of controversies in the modern era, especially over the last two centuries, has been the place of the Gospel of John amid the quests for the Jesus of history (Anderson 2006b, 1–6, 191–92). Here too the Johannine Gospel has become an enigma, gathering critics and advocates as to its historicity or *lack* thereof. Whether this investigation will be able to make a difference, only time will tell, and it may take another two centuries to find an effective set of ways forward in these complex conundrums. That, however, is a journey on which we at least embark today.



## PART 1: INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

In this section Tom Thatcher introduces the work of the John, Jesus, and History Project, and Paul Anderson outlines his understanding of the contribution such a project makes both within Johannine and Jesus studies today. As a co-chair and founding organizer of the project, Thatcher has done considerable work examining the “riddles” of Jesus as portrayed in John and elsewhere (2000; 2006), showing how these and folklore hero stories functioned rhetorically within ancient narrative. In his monograph on why the Gospel of John was written (2005), Thatcher develops a theory of historiography in the Johannine tradition rooted in social memory theory and its development within the Johannine situation. In doing so, he poses a new way of understanding John’s rhetorical interest in the Jesus of history. Tom has also gathered two cutting-edge collections of Johannine essays: the first illuminating perspectives on Jesus in Johannine tradition (with Fortna 2001); the second providing important bases for the present work and future Johannine research (2007). In his introductory essay below, Thatcher explains how the project came together and outlines the scope and depth of its vision.

Paul Anderson, the other co-chair of the John, Jesus, and History Project, assesses the strengths and weaknesses of six planks of each of the two prevalent platforms among modern scholars: the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus. First presented at the 2003 meetings, this essay was also included as part 2 of his new book on the Fourth Gospel and the quest for Jesus, where he also outlines his new theory of John’s dialogical autonomy and individuated relations to other traditions (2006b, 43–97). His work on John’s Christology not only challenged Bultmann’s evidence for John’s diachronic composition—on its own terms, but it also introduced cognitive-critical analysis to the studying of Gospel traditions—their origins, and their developments (1996). The last appendix in that book even claims to have discovered an overlooked first-century clue to Johannine authorship. Identifying no fewer than four crises in the Johannine situation adumbrated by John 6 (1997), Anderson refuses to allow the second level of a two-level reading of John to eclipse the first. He thus presents the Johannine and Markan Gospels side by side, posing a more nuanced and “bi-optic” approach to Jesus (2001a; 2001b) in the light of John’s historical and theological interests (2006a; 2006b).



## INTRODUCTION: THE JOHN, JESUS, AND HISTORY PROJECT

*Tom Thatcher*

This volume reflects the deliberations of the John, Jesus, and History Group in the Society of Biblical Literature. The John, Jesus, and History Group, whose annual meetings are regularly attended by more than 350 scholars, was formed to provide a forum for the discussion of issues related to the historical background and composition history of the Johannine literature (the Fourth Gospel and 1, 2, 3 John). During the first three years of its existence (2002–2004), the Group’s meetings showcased invited papers from leading biblical scholars on topics pertaining to the relationship between the Johannine literature and the study of the historical Jesus. Specifically, during this initial phase of deliberations, the Group focused on preliminary issues relevant to a study of the Fourth Gospel’s “historicity,” including “state of research” questions, discussions of the reasonable results of such an inquiry, and methodological problems. As the following essays will reveal, these discussions have generated substantial new insights on questions that are significant both to the interpretation of the Johannine literature and to the study of the life and teachings of Jesus.

A quick survey of the table of contents will reveal that the contributors reflect a wide range of theological and methodological backgrounds. This diversity is the primary strength of the volume, illustrative of the broad number of approaches to John’s historicity currently in circulation. At the same time, however, the individual essays are united by three key presuppositions about the need for, and potential value of, such a project.

First, to borrow a well-worn phrase from Clement of Alexandria, the essays included here presuppose that *all* Gospels are “spiritual Gospels,” not just the Gospel of John. While the Fourth Evangelist perhaps wears his theological interests on his sleeve to a greater extent than Matthew, Mark, or Luke, no early Christian was interested in Jesus as a purely historical figure. As a result, the Gospel of John should not be excluded from discussions of the historical Jesus simply because it expresses a unique theological perspective, at least not at the starting point of the inquiry. Of course, this is not to say that the Fourth Gospel should be given special preference or that John’s outlook on Jesus was more “historical” than that of other early Christians. It is to say, however, that the Johannine

literature must be evaluated on its own terms and that the Gospel of John should not be automatically disregarded simply because it differs from the Synoptics.

Second, the essays presuppose that a serious reconsideration of the historical context of the Johannine literature is relevant to significant problems in Christian origins. At the very least, such a reconsideration is likely to produce helpful insights for our understanding of Johannine Christianity, a major branch of the early church, and of the texts that Johannine Christians produced. The contributors show an acute interest not only in John's relationship to the historical Jesus, but also (and in some cases primarily) in the Fourth Gospel's relationship to its surrounding environment and the impact of that environment on its presentation of the Jesus story.

Third, the essays underscore the fact that any fresh attempt to explain the complex relationship between John, Jesus, and history will require a substantial reconsideration not only of the Johannine literature, but also of the very meaning of the word "history" and of current methods for studying the historical Jesus. On the history question, the Fourth Evangelist claims more forcefully than any other ancient author that his account is based on someone's direct contact with Jesus (see esp. John 19:35; 21:24). But John also admits quite freely that his "memory" of Christ is a conflation of witness, postresurrection faith, Scripture, and Spirit (see 2:22; 12:16; 14:15–26). Among all early Gospel traditions, John offers the most explicit articulation of his theory of the Jesus tradition, but recent advances in critical analysis of the Fourth Gospel have yet to be taken seriously within the larger set of historical-Jesus studies. On the question of method, a serious study of John's historicity reveals not only the need for a better understanding of "historicity" but also the limits of the tools currently used in Jesus research. Some of them may work well for Synoptic analysis, but their adequacy is less applicable to Johannine texts and issues. Because the Fourth Gospel has been marginalized for so long in historical Jesus studies, any sustained reevaluation of its historical value is essentially a critique of current models for explaining Christian origins.

The above assertion—that any serious reconsideration of the historical value of the Johannine literature will require a reappraisal of both the goals and methods of Jesus scholarship—runs so counter to the current of recent inquiry that it requires further explanation. Any really "new" assessment of John's historicity must begin with an acute awareness that one cannot simply start with the Synoptics and work backwards. This may seem obvious, but the search for a non-Synoptic lens through which to view John's Jesus is actually an arduous task in itself—one that has yet to be achieved. All the major tools that are used today to locate Jesus tradition in the extant sources and to reconstruct the historical Jesus from that tradition—including form, source, and redaction criticism and the "criteria of authenticity" born in the logic of these methods—were developed from, and in service of, the study of the Synoptic Gospels under the Two and Four Source models. As a result, the entire historical-Jesus enterprise, as it exists today, is inherently set against the Fourth Gospel and every other potential source

that does not fit the Synoptic mold. One cannot really say that scholars in the past century have *concluded* that the Fourth Gospel, in Bultmann's infamous dictum, "cannot be taken into account at all as a source for the teaching of Jesus" (Bultmann 1958, 12); one must say, rather, that scholars have simply *precluded* that John is a "spiritual Gospel" because our methods of research do not fit the type of data that John provides (a problem that also plagues current study of the Gospel of Thomas and other noncanonical sources). John rotates on its own axis and follows its own orbit, and these trajectories must be traced using tools appropriate to their peculiar nature.

It is also important to stress at the outset what the editors of, and contributors to, this volume do *not* presuppose. First, as will quickly become evident, we do not presuppose that there is any one right way to go about this investigation (although most of us have gone on record about our personal views). Essentially, our minds remain open, and we hope that those of our readers do as well. Second, it should be pointed out that neither members of the John, Jesus, and History Steering Committee (Alan Culpepper, D. Moody Smith, Mary Coloe, Jamie Clark Soles, Felix Just, Paul Anderson, and myself) nor our presenters necessarily embrace the same views on John's historicity or lack thereof. Nor do we pretend to agree on complex issues of John's composition and literary development, the history of the Johannine situation, or theological interpretations of weighty Johannine themes. We agree, simply, that critical work deserves to be done on aspects of John's historicity, and that the best of interdisciplinary approaches deserve to be applied to the venture.

This leads to a third point: this venture is decidedly *critical*, and *not* an advocacy for or against particular traditional or critical views. We do not presuppose that any specific passage or piece of information from the Johannine literature is necessarily "historical" in the popular sense of that word, but neither do we denigrate its historical plausibility simply because it is found within these books. Nor do we assume that all or most of the material in the Fourth Gospel is "traditional" in the sense that it existed before that text was written (i.e., that the Evangelist did not simply "make it up" as he went along), and neither do we infer the converse. Papers are invited from all perspectives, but the one thing they must do—whether arguing for or against the historicity of a passage—is to articulate the critical reasons for putting forward such a thesis. We seek to make a serious contribution to critical discussion, believing that even small advances in how to approach these larger issues will be valuable.

While some of our authors will come across as more hopeful than others, this project is not intended to showcase wishful thinking. It is, rather, intended to stimulate critical dialogue that will produce a more adequate understanding of the background and development of the Johannine literature, to cross the gap between Johannine studies and Jesus studies, to stake out the terrain where a discussion of John's value as a witness to Jesus might become serviceable, as well as clarifying where it might not. When current methods and paradigms of analysis

do not fit the data under consideration, it is necessary to develop more adequate methods and paradigms. The potential value of the search for those methods, and the positive dialogue that such a quest can produce, ultimately make a reconsideration of John, Jesus, and history worthwhile.

## WHY THIS STUDY IS NEEDED, AND WHY IT IS NEEDED NOW

*Paul N. Anderson*

Jesus and Gospel studies possess rich histories of analysis, and within those histories new findings and distinctive trends emerge. Few scholarly developments—in any field—have been as interesting, however, as the modernistic dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> To a certain degree, each of these trends has bolstered the other, and the assertion of many a scholar claiming the authoritative weight of critical and scientific study is that the one thing we know for sure is actually two: the Fourth Gospel is of *no* historical value, and historical Jesus research must be performed *untainted* by any Johannine influence.<sup>2</sup> The question is the degree to which either of these assertions is true, a solid platform upon which to base the frameworks of further studies. Negative claims are even more difficult to substantiate than positive ones, and surprisingly large numbers of scholars speak in terms of certainty along either or both of these propositions. Simply challenging

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1. These terms were coined by the John, Jesus, and History steering committee, as they seemed to describe pointedly the so-called “critical consensus” on the two primary issues involved. Happy to grant them privileged status as prevalent modernist views, the question is how well they stand up to critical scrutiny as predominant platforms for conducting further critical investigations. This essay was published as part 2 in Paul Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus* (2006b) as “On Planks and Platforms—A Critical Assessment of Critical Foundations Regarding John, Jesus and History” (pp. 43–97). Permission to republish it within this volume is appreciated.

2. Can it be put any clearer than the introductory statement of Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997, 10)? “The first step is to understand the diminished role the Gospel of John plays in the search for the Jesus of history. The two pictures painted by John and the synoptics cannot be both historically accurate.... The differences between the two portraits of Jesus show up in a dramatic way in the evaluation, by the Jesus Seminar, of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John. The Fellows of the Seminar were unable to find a single saying they could with certainty trace back to the historical Jesus.” So much for the words of Jesus; the results of the Jesus Seminar’s analysis of the actions of Jesus (Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998) are equally sparse. *None* of Jesus’ deeds in John are rooted in history, save the death of Jesus (433, 435), in their analysis.

a traditional view, however, does not confirm an alternative view, and the planks in these platforms should be tested with the same critical scrutiny and rigor as those they endeavor to supplant. This is *why* this study is needed.

Obviously, John's ahistoricity goes against the traditional view that the Fourth Gospel was written by the apostle John, connected inferentially with the redactor's claim that the Johannine Evangelist was an eyewitness who leaned against Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, was present at the crucifixion, and that "his witness is true" (John 13:23; 19:26, 34–35; 21:7, 20, 24). Over half a century ago Pierson Parker declared, "If there was one 'assured result of biblical criticism' for such scholars of the 20's, 30's and 40's, it was that John, the son of Zebedee, had nothing at all to do with the writing of this gospel" (1962, 35). Another scholar more recently has even declared that the burden of proof is now upon any who would challenge the purported scholarly consensus regarding John's patent ahistoricity.<sup>3</sup> This claim reflects an interest in establishing the sort of "critical orthodoxy" Bishop Robinson alluded to half a century ago.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the question in traditionalist circles used to be whether or not one believed in the historicity of John, the litmus test for the modernist biblical scholar has come to be: Do you believe in the *ahistoricity* of John? Because a scholar's livelihood and career may hinge upon distinguishing oneself as a hard-minded scientific scholar rather than a soft-hearted traditionalist, the stakes are indeed high. Further, no scholar wants to come across as embracing a naively traditionalistic view, yet the present critical question remains: Is the ahistoricity of John an open-and-shut case—on *critical* grounds? If so, fine. Scholars may build on a solid platform, conducting further studies upon an established foundation. However, if the modernist platform fails to stand up to critical analyses, or if parts of it are found to be less solid than others, critical scholarship at the dawn of the postmodern era demands an alternative. This is why this study is needed *now*.

Before continuing with analysis, however, two points deserve to be made before acknowledging a scholarly consensus exists at all on the matter. First, many, perhaps even most, of the leading Johannine scholars over the last two centuries would not have agreed to John's patent ahistoricity; so, if any "consensus" exists, it must be regarded as one that is purported among a group that excludes many of the

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3. Robert Funk (1996, 127) goes on to say: "In the Gospel of John, Jesus is a self-confessing messiah rather than a self-effacing sage. In John, Jesus seems to have little concern for the impoverished, the disabled, and the religious outcasts. Although John preserves the illusion of combining a real Jesus with the mythic Christ, the human side of Jesus is in fact diminished. For all these reasons, the current quest for the historical Jesus makes little use of the heavily interpreted data found in the Gospel of John."

4. While John A. T. Robinson's essay (1959) called for a "New Look at the Fourth Gospel," his monograph on the "priority of John" (1985) claimed too much by equating early tradition with early finalization. A more plausible approach would connect primitivity of tradition with its development and later finalization.



keenest experts in the field. One need only consider the works of Schleiermacher, Lightfoot, Westcott, Sanday, Robinson, Hoskyns, Dodd, Brown, Schnackenburg, Barrett, Lindars, Carson, Beasley-Murray, Morris, Hengel, and many others to realize that many of the great Johannine scholars of the modern era stood or would have stood against the purported consensus. As Raymond Brown says,

We are not always to assume facilely that the Synoptic Gospels are recording the historical fact and that Jn has theologically reorganized the data. In the cases we have studied, an interesting case can be made out for the basic historicity of the Johannine picture and for theological reorganization on the part of the Synoptic Gospels. We are coming to realize more and more that the critics have played us false in their minimal estimate of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>5</sup> (1965, 271)

A second fact, however, is that even some of the most skeptical of scholars have expressed reservations regarding the degree to which certainty about John's ahistoricity can be assumed. A telling example of such a turnaround may be found in David Strauss's introduction to his third edition of his *Life of Christ*. In response to criticisms regarding his earlier marginalizations of John's historicity, he reversed himself as follows:<sup>6</sup>

The changes offered by this new edition are all more or less related to the fact that a renewed study of the Fourth Gospel, on the basis of de Wette's commentary and Neander's *Leben Jesu Christi*, has made me again *doubtful of my earlier doubt* concerning the authenticity and credibility of this Gospel. It is not that I have become convinced of its authenticity, merely that I am *no longer certain of its inauthenticity*. From among the peculiarly striking and frustrating features of credibility and incredibility, of proximity to and distance from the truth, which exist in this most remarkable Gospel, I had emphasized in the first composition of my work, with one-sided polemical zeal, only what seemed to me the adverse and unfavorable side. In the meanwhile the other side has gradually come into its own for me.

Ironically, many scholars aligning themselves with the revisionist view outlined by Strauss, F. C. Baur, and others have failed to balance their critical views with reflective nuance. Just as a traditionalist arguing for the eyewitness historicity of

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5. In another essay on John's historicity (1962), Brown argues that the Johannine rendering of the Last Supper on Thursday seems more plausible historically. Arguably, the Synoptics have stylized it as a Passover meal to conform with emerging Christian worship practices, a judgment bolstered by the criterion of dissimilarity. Brown further develops and refines his belief in John's historicity in his revised and expanded introduction to John (2003, 90–114).

6. Here David Friedrich Strauss (1972, lvii) seeks to hold the negative and positive aspects of critical study together in tension, but he reverts to his earlier skepticism in his fourth edition under the influence of Baur.

everything in John based upon shallow assumptions is flawed, so is an unreflective arguing of a critical view. For some reason, while the Gospel of John possesses the most extensive and explicit claims to represent a firsthand narration of Jesus' works and ministry, it has ceded place to the Gospel of Thomas and other second-century apocryphal narratives in some recent Jesus studies. The question is whether those exchanges are warranted and whether a distorted presentation of Jesus is being constructed by those who claim to know. On the other hand, there are good reasons for scholars to question John's historicity and contribution to understanding Jesus and his ministry, so the bases for these platforms deserve fresh critical consideration. Such is the critical interest of the present investigation.

## 1. PLANKS IN PLATFORM A: THE DEHISTORICIZATION OF JOHN

John's claims to historicity are problematic. In many ways John's presentation differs significantly from those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the Johannine Jesus is clearly crafted in the image of the Evangelist's own convictions. Further, the Fourth Evangelist's presentation of Jesus is a spiritualized one, which raises questions as to the motives for particular aspects in the construction of the Johannine narrative. As the main planks in the platform of John's dehistoricization are analyzed, including an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, the bases for this judgment will be better ascertained. Fresh considerations of classic problems also may lead to other ways forward not yet considered, but such can only be envisioned at the end of such an analysis.

### 1.1. JOHN'S DIFFERENCES WITH THE SYNOPTICS

A great and puzzling fact of biblical studies is that John is *very* different from the Synoptics. Rather than a birth narrative, John's story begins with the advent of the eternal Logos. Rather than ministering for only one year, three Passovers are mentioned in John. Rather than cleansing the temple at the end of Jesus' ministry, John's temple incident is at the beginning, and John mentions two miracles that were the first ones performed in Cana of Galilee. Rather than ministering exclusively in Galilee, the Johannine Jesus goes to and from Jerusalem and performs three Judean miracles. Rather than teaching pervasively about the kingdom of God and doing so in parables and in short, pithy sayings, the Johannine Jesus speaks in long I-Am discourses, engaging the kingdom motif in only two passages. In contrast to the Synoptic Jesus, John's Jesus performs no exorcisms but knows what is in the hearts of humans and escapes capture in knowing ways. Finally, rather than celebrating the Last Supper as a Passover meal where the Eucharist is instituted, the Johannine rendering omits the words of institution and presents the event as happening the day before the Passover meal would have taken place. These are just some of the facts that contribute to preferring the Synoptics' presentation historically over the Johannine.

**Strengths.** John's ahistoricity seems to be confirmed if one assumes a three-against-one majority, with John being the lone Gospel out. This indeed was the argument of Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, who in 1820 argued that, because of the threefold witness of the Synoptics, they could not possibly have concocted their view, while the same cannot be claimed for John.<sup>7</sup> Rather, he argued that the historical probability of material in John should be considered low, and a generation later Strauss levied this argument against Friedrich Schleiermacher's preference for John's historicity over and against the Synoptics, designating Bretschneider to be *the true man of science* on the matter.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Jesus could have cleared the temple more than once, but John's presentation, because it is out of step with the majority, calls for explanations on grounds other than historical ones. Likewise, in the presentation of Jesus' teachings, the Synoptic presentation of Jesus' use of parables seems far more reliable as a guide to Jesus' teaching ministry than the more elevated revelatory discourses in the Johannine I-Am sayings. These are some of the good reasons for questioning John's historicity on the basis of major differences with the Synoptics.

**Weaknesses.** If Luke and Matthew used Mark, however, viewing John's differences with the Synoptics as a three-against-one minority must be reconsidered. Critically, scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who took this view did so *before* Markan priority was established, but later scholars failed to make the appropriate self-correction along the way. If Mark got it wrong here and there, so did Matthew and Luke. If John and Mark are worthy of being considered *the Bi-Optic Gospels*, as several recent studies have argued,<sup>9</sup> this means that the door must be held open in ascribing greater or lesser degrees of historicity to the Johannine and Markan traditions. For instance, John may be more realistic in presenting a Jesus who traveled to and from Jerusalem, like most observant Jews would have done during his time. This being the case, John's three-year ministry also seems more realistic than Mark's one-year presentation, perhaps locating all the Jerusalem and judgment material at the end for the purposes of a narrative climax rather than reflecting chronological knowledge. Indeed, Mark's gathering of Jesus material and ordering it into a progressive narrative must have involved some conjecture, and the killing of Jesus due to a temple disturbance is far more

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7. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1820) questions several features of John as being inauthentic: Jesus' speaking with exalted self-references; his knowing the hearts of others; his claim to represent God; and all his miraculous deeds. By hastily excluding all of John's wondrous reports and themes from his perceived categories of naturalism, Bretschneider expels John from the canons of historicity in the name of modest, scientific inquiry.

8. Strauss (1977, 41) fails, however, to appreciate much of the critically significant work conducted by Schleiermacher, such as his extensive observations about the fragmented character of the Synoptic narratives in contrast to the more unitive Johannine narrations.

9. See part 3 in Anderson 2006b, especially table 3.3, reproduced below as appendix 1.

likely to have been inferred (“concocted,” to use Bretschneider’s language) than the unlikely-to-have-been imagined “threat of the risen Lazarus” as portrayed in John.

Was this a factor in the second-century opinion of Papias (quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39; few scholars if any have noted that Papias cites *the Johannine Elder* as the source of this opinion!), that while Mark preserved Peter’s preaching effectively, he got it down *in the wrong order*? If such were the case, one of the motivations for producing the “second Gospel” (John’s first edition was completed around 80–85 C.E., *before* the Gospels of Luke and Matthew) might have been to set the record straight.<sup>10</sup> John should thus be reconceived at least in part as a complementary presentation for readers and hearers of Mark,<sup>11</sup> and some of John’s contrasts to Mark may have been intentional. Indeed, Matthew and Luke eventually did the same, as did the editor who added the second ending of Mark. With these issues in mind, the fact of John’s differences from the Synoptics does not force a three-against-one overruling of John’s account. We have two individuated perspectives between John and Mark, the Bi-Optic Gospels, and any assumptions about how early Christian narrators would have gathered and presented their material must also be subjected to critical scrutiny. The case is thus still open, and exploring these distinctive presentations analytically may yet lead to some new ways of approaching longstanding New Testament riddles.

## 1.2. SYNOPTIC OMISSIONS IN JOHN

One of the strongest arguments against an apostolic origin of John’s material is that leading themes and events in the Synoptics, especially those at which the sons of Zebedee are reported as being present, are missing. First, the calling of the Twelve is not found in John, nor are more than eight disciples mentioned. Second, the transfiguration is not mentioned in John, nor is it reported that Peter, James, and John had gone with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. Third, if the Beloved Disciple really had been leaning against the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper, how could he have missed the institution of a meal of remembrance? That would certainly have been an unlikely event to have forgotten or omitted. Fourth, Jesus’

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10. Of all the theories of John’s composition, the most compelling is the two-edition theory of Barnabas Lindars (1984), inferring a first edition emerging around 80, to which the editor added supplementary material after the death of the Beloved Disciple around 100 CE. Here I agree with Bultmann, however, that the compiler may likely have been the author of the Johannine Epistles, rather than the evangelist himself (contra Lindars), thus leading one to believe that the Epistles were plausibly written *between* these two editions. I concur with Lindars that material added to the final edition included the Prologue (John 1:1–18), chs. 6, 15–17, and 21, and Beloved Disciple and eyewitness passages. Contra Lindars, evidence for the translocation of the Temple cleansing making space for the Lazarus narrative seems weak.

11. The relation between John and Mark as the two “Bi-Optic Gospels” is developed elsewhere (Anderson 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, and 2006b).

having spoken in parables about the kingdom of God is terribly conspicuous as a pervasive omission in John. Fifth, Jesus' exorcisms are not mentioned at all in John. These facts pose major problems for anyone arguing that the Synoptic and Johannine presentations of Jesus are both historically reliable.

**Strengths.** Indeed, if the apostle John were in some way connected to the purveying of the Johannine witness, it seems odd that many of the points at which we might expect an event to have been embellished or expanded are characterized by pervasive silence. How could the son of Zebedee, for instance, have omitted the calling of the Twelve, the transfiguration, the words of the institution, and the anguish of Jesus at Gethsemane, if he were indeed both present at those events *and* the traditional source of the Fourth Gospel? These facts pose major problems for the traditional view of John's authorship, and they are one of the key reasons critical scholars reject it. A further problem is that the sons of Zebedee are referred to as *βοανηγῆς* (sons of thunder) in Mark 3:17, and elsewhere they are reported as wanting to call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:54). The reflective character of the Fourth Gospel seems to betray a very different personality type, to say the least. Beyond these particulars, the omission of Jesus' parables, major teachings on the kingdom of God, and exorcisms make it very difficult to reconcile an apostolic or eyewitness origin of John's material, even if the author was not the son of Zebedee. For these reasons, one can understand why critical scholars might find the traditional view of John's authorship problematic.

**Weaknesses.** On the other hand, the Markan presentation of the disciples, including the sons of Zebedee, might not have been completely untainted by subjectivity when considering *its* historicity. The ambivalent presentation of the sons of Zebedee would certainly have furthered the personal interests of someone like Peter, if he or anyone like him were indeed a source of Mark's tradition. For instance, their having been included along with Peter here and there might reflect a Petrine co-opting of *their* authority, whereby the inclusion of Peter within an inner ring (the sons of his employer) would have served his own interests as a narrator, let alone the interests of those wanting to preserve his memory. Note that it was Peter who in Acts 1 is presented as wanting to preserve "the Twelve" and who calls for a successor to Judas. Certainly the presentation of the sons of Zebedee as desiring precedence among the disciples is rejected by the Markan Jesus—just as Peter's failure to comprehend servanthood is presented graphically in John 13 and 21. Note that the martyrdom of the sons of Zebedee is predicted by Jesus in Mark (10:38–39), whereas the martyrdom of Peter is predicted by Jesus in John (21:18–19). Was the labeling of James and John as thunderheads a sober, *historical* judgment in the Markan or pre-Markan tradition, or was it a factor of Petrine projection?<sup>12</sup> The point here is not to argue for particular personalities

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12. Neither is the point being made here that Peter, or John, or any other *particular* person lay behind these trajectories. Impressive, however, is the fact that from the earliest stages of

underlying Gospel traditions; the point is that making too much about what can and cannot have been true regarding particular disciples, based upon a few terse comments in Mark, overreaches the bounds of historical demonstrability from the Synoptic side. Motive criticism may be the tool more appropriate here than historical criticism. Therefore, the grounds for excluding *anyone* from Johannine authorship based upon Synoptic presentations of Jesus' followers are weak.

Another weakness of making too much out of Johannine omissions of the Synoptic presentations of Jesus' ministry is that it fails to account for more plausible explanations. For instance, if the Fourth Evangelist were familiar with at least parts of Mark, it could be that parts were left out because of a desire to be complementary.<sup>13</sup> A primitive witness poses that John filled out the earlier parts of Jesus' ministry,<sup>14</sup> and this might explain the emphasis upon the wedding miracle and the healing of the official's son as the first two signs performed in Galilee. The point may have been setting the record straight over and against the Markan presentation of the exorcism of the demoniac and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1. Likewise, the other three miracles in the first edition of John<sup>15</sup> are all three *Judean miracles*, perhaps filling out the almost entirely northern ministry of Jesus in the Synoptics. Therefore, if the Fourth Evangelist were intentionally seeking to complement and augment Mark, this would explain why much of Mark's material was left out. Matthew and Luke built *upon* Mark; John built *around* Mark.<sup>16</sup> The likelihood that John 6 was added as part of the final edition of John throws the augmentive function of John's first edition (probably between 80 and 85 C.E.) into sharper relief. If the five signs in John's first edition fill out the earlier and the Judean aspects of Jesus' ministry as a complement to Mark, John's omissions of most of Mark's material are not scandalous but understandable.

A further point deserves to be made here. The omission of the transfiguration scene in John is more likely to have been related to the Johannine distinctive presentation of Moses and Elijah than an oversight. In Mark, the roles of Moses

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Gospel traditions to the era following their finalization one can infer distinctively "Petrine" and "Johannine" *trajectories* (Anderson 1996, 153–60, esp. notes 22–26) on at least seven different themes.

13. The impressive 1998 Ph.D. thesis of Ian Donald Mackay on John 6 and Mark 6 and 8 changed my mind on this score (published 2004). I now see John's independence from Mark as *nondependence* rather than *isolation*.

14. Note the comment in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.24.7–13 to this effect. The connecting of the first two signs in Cana of Galilee with a chronological augmentation interest casts at least part of the Johannine Evangelist's purpose into sharp relief with reference to Mark in particular.

15. A flawed assumption is that because the Johannine Evangelist fills out the Judean ministry of Jesus, he must have been a southerner rather than a Galilean (see, e.g., Parker 1962). None of Parker's twenty-one points is compelling—individually or collectively.

16. See Anderson 2006b, part 3.

and Elijah are fulfilled in two ways: they appear at the transfiguration (in keeping with the prophecy of Mal 4:4–5); and they are present in the ministry of John the Baptist. In John, however, the Baptist denies that he is either the prophet (Moses) or Elijah (John 1:19–27). Here Johannine augmentation of Mark moves to correction. The Baptist explicitly denies these associations in John, clearing the way for both typologies being fulfilled in Jesus. Not only does Jesus perform the same sort of signs as Elijah had performed (in the Johannine feeding, even the same word is used for the barley loaves that Elijah had reproduced: κριθῖνος; see 2 Kgs 4:43 LXX), but he is explicitly hailed as the prophet like Moses predicted in Deut 18:15–22 (John 6:1–15). It is no exaggeration to say that the entirety of the Johannine Jesus' sense of agency is cast in the form of the Mosaic prophet,<sup>17</sup> and this may have played a role in John's omission of the Markan transfiguration scene. Jesus, not the Baptist, fulfills the typologies of Elijah and Moses in John.

A strict "omission of Synoptic material" view of John, however, must be tempered by noticing the many nonidentical similarities between the two traditions. Many of John's miracles are similar to Synoptic ones (healing of an official's servant/child, healing of a paralytic, healing of a blind man, raising of someone from the dead, etc.), but other than the feeding and the sea crossing, they do not appear to refer to the same events. Likewise, Synoptic-like sayings have long been noted in John, but they have not been thought of as authentic aphorisms by recent historical Jesus studies. The characteristic agrarian metaphors associated with the Synoptic Jesus—presented in terse, aphoristic form—appear to have been displaced by long revelatory discourses in John. A closer look, however, shows that these sorts of sayings are far from missing in John. Indeed, Jesus' revelatory discourses do develop themes in ways quite distinctive from sayings in the Synoptics, but it cannot be said that agrarian images are missing from John or that short, terse Jesus-sayings are absent from the Johannine text. A factor in their having been missed is their placement within dialogues and within the body of larger discourses. They are not *absent* from John, and one cannot say that their presence in John simply marks Synoptic derivation. Several agrarian wisdom aphorisms are found in distinctively Johannine settings, and these sayings conform very closely to the criteria otherwise used to distinguish historical Jesus sayings. If they were found in Mark or Thomas, rather than John, few scholars would question their authenticity. Consider, for instance, the great number of Synoptic-like aphorisms in John 4 and 12 alone:<sup>18</sup>

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17. See the many connections between the septuagintal rendering of Deut 18:15–22 and the Johannine Father-Son relationship (Anderson 1999a).

18. See below the over six dozen aphorisms in John detected by Drummond 1904 and Bridges 1987.



- ▶ “I have ‘food’ to eat you know nothing about.” (4:32)
- ▶ “My ‘food’ is that I might do the work of the Having-Sent-Me-One and might accomplish his work.” (4:34)
- ▶ “Do you not say, ‘It will take about four months for the harvest to come?’ Look, I say to you, lift up you eyes and see the fields because they are already white with harvest.” (4:35)
- ▶ “The one reaping receives wages and gathers grain unto eternal life in order that the sower might celebrate together with the reaper. For in this the saying is true, that ‘one sows and another reaps,’ I sent you to harvest what you have not worked for; others have labored, and you have enjoyed the benefits of their hard work.” (4:36–38)
- ▶ “Unless a wheat kernel dies by dropping into the ground, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears great quantities of wheat.” (12:24)
- ▶ “The one loving his life will lose it; but the one hating his life in this world will keep it for eternity.” (12:25)
- ▶ “If anyone serves me, let him follow me, and where I am there will my servant be. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him.” (12:26)
- ▶ “The time for the judgment of this world has now arrived: the ruler of this world shall now be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself.” (12:31–32)
- ▶ “You only have the light among you for a short time. Walk in the light you have lest darkness overtake you; because the one walking in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light.” (12:35–36)

The Johannine omission of kingdom sayings, parables, and exorcisms is more problematic. John does have two “kingdom” passages in John 3 and 18, but both are corrective rather than elucidative. The kingdom is *not* this but that. Then again, while John has no Synoptic-like parables, Jesus’ disciples report being troubled by his speaking in riddles (παροιμίας, John 10:6; 16:25–30) and celebrate his speaking plainly. This harkens back to the more primitive Markan presentation of parables as wedges dividing insiders and outsiders rather than being means of clarification (Mark 4:11–12, 33–34). Of course, John’s I-Am sayings are highly metaphorical, as are the Synoptic parables, but they are presented in a distinctively Johannine form. Why the exorcisms of Jesus are omitted from John is difficult to explain, other than to point out that *all* the Synoptic miracles were omitted from the first Johannine edition. Then again, an incidental Markan detail is interesting to consider. The particular disciple who was uncomfortable with other exorcists in Mark and who reported to Jesus that they had asked them to desist was none other than John, the son of Zebedee (Mark 9:38).<sup>19</sup> If this disciple,

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19. While the discovery of a hitherto overlooked first-century clue to Johannine authorship



or others like him, had anything to do with any stage of the Johannine presentation of Jesus' ministry, discomfort with exorcist ministries may have been a factor in John's omission of Jesus' exorcisms. Because of the vulnerability of making too much out of John's omissions of Synoptic material, especially with relation to who could and could not have been connected to the Johannine tradition, the critical scholar should exercise caution before dehistoricizing John too readily.

Unlike Mark, John contains only two sections that develop the kingdom motif, and rather than being illustrative they are antithetical. They suggest what the active reign of God is like *in contrast to* alternative understandings of it. In contrast to Nicodemus's religious understanding of the kingdom of God, Jesus emphasizes the need to be born from above, using the powerful effect of the invisible wind as a metaphor (John 3:1–21). And, with reference to Pilate's political understanding of power, Jesus declares that the kingdom is one of truth (18:33–38), explaining that this is why his disciples do not fight or resort to force. In these two passages one could infer a Johannine contrasting of the reign of God to two primary worldly spheres: the *religious* and the *political*. Does this mean, however, that the teachings of Jesus on the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (kingdom of God) are pervasively missing in John, or do we have a Johannine representation of the essential kingdom teaching of Jesus, even as represented in the fuller Synoptic accounts? After all, the spiritual workings of God's active and dynamic reign are indeed contrasted with the human scaffoldings of the religious quest in the Synoptics, and the truthful and penetrating activity of God's present-and-ultimate reign is contrasted to all worldly powers—political and otherwise. In that sense, rather than leaving out Jesus' teachings on the kingdom, it could be said that John *summarizes* them. When considering kingdom language in John, however, it is not entirely void. John has a considerable number of kingdom references, but they focus largely on the βασιλεὺς, Jesus, rather than on the βασιλεία, the kingdom.<sup>20</sup> On the face of it, one could consider John's dearth of Synoptic-like kingdom parables and teachings as evidence of disconnectedness from a Jesus tradition, but this misreads the evidence. John's presentation of *Jesus* as a king

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might not make much of a difference to scholars convinced of John's nonapostolic authorship (Anderson 1996, 274–77), it challenges the view that Irenaeus was the first to make such a connection. Peter and John are presented as speaking in Acts 4:19–20 in two characteristic statements: one Petrine and the other Johannine (see Acts 5:29 and 11:17 for the first; 1 John 1:3 and John 3:32 for the second). Luke's even unintended connecting of the apostle John with a characteristically Johannine phrase—a full century before Irenaeus—approximates a fact, calling for critical consideration of the implications.

20. Consider, for instance, these references to Jesus in Johannine kingdom terms: Jesus is acclaimed as the king of Israel (John 1:49; 12:13), is embraced as a king like Moses (6:15), fulfills the kingly prophecy of Zech 9:9 (John 12:15), is questioned and affirmed as a king (18:37; 19:12), and is presented and disputed as the king of the Jews (18:33, 39; 19:3, 14, 15, 19, 21). John's is a Christocentric basileiology.

is even more pronounced than those of the Synoptics, and the source of those differences more likely resides in an alternative emphasis and the individuated development of the Johannine tradition itself.

While major Synoptic themes and features are omitted from John, the default inference of John's ahistoricity is naïve and simplistic. Other motives and factors are more compelling in explaining these facts. Such interests as "building around" Mark in nonduplicative ways, reserving the Moses and Elijah typologies for Jesus (not John the Baptist), preferences against exorcisms (especially when rendering a narrative in a Gentile setting), and a practice of paraphrasing Jesus' teachings in Johannine forms of delivery cause a rethinking of the larger issues. It is also a fact that much Synoptic-type material is present in a distinctively Johannine form, so "total absence" is often *not* the case; rather, an alternative presentation is. A classic case in point is the way the Lord's Prayer can be said to be found in embellished form in John 17.<sup>21</sup> Finally, since argument from silence is an extremely tenuous basis on which to build, it cannot be said that this is a very sturdy plank, able to support much interpretive weight.

### 1.3. JOHANNINE OMISSIONS IN THE SYNOPTICS

Considering the material distinctive to John, many of Jesus' sayings and deeds are among the most memorable in the four Gospels. The great I-Am sayings (I am the bread of life, light of the world, resurrection and the life, good shepherd, true vine, and the way, the truth, and the life) in John are certainly rich with content and of great importance christologically. Five of John's miracles (the wedding miracle, the healing of the official's son, the healing of the Jerusalem paralytic, the healing of the blind man, and the raising of Lazarus) are nowhere mentioned in the Synoptics. The oddity here is that *if* these sayings and events really happened, how could they *not* be mentioned or closely replicated in the other three Gospels? Other distinctively Johannine events also stand out, such as Jesus' dramatic dialogues with the likes of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Jewish leaders, Pilate, and Peter. Finally, Jesus is portrayed in John as having visited Jerusalem at least four times during his ministry, whereas in the Synoptics he visits Jerusalem *only once*—the time when he was crucified. Given their absence from the Synoptics, the inference is that much of John's material must have originated in some way *other* than historicity, requiring alternative explanations.

**Strengths.** Obviously, the raising of Lazarus would have been considered one of Jesus' greatest miracles by all who knew about it, and its absence from the Synoptics strongly suggests that it was not known by their writers. Put otherwise, if the raising of Lazarus indeed happened, how could it possibly be confined to a

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21. C. F. Evans builds this case in his provocative essay (1977), making one wonder if the Johannine prayer is an expansion or the Q prayer of Jesus an abbreviation.

minority report of one Gospel narrative?<sup>22</sup> Because the Johannine signs clearly serve the rhetorical purposes of the Fourth Evangelist, presenting evidence that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah, the distinctive Johannine signs could have had an origin other than public historical events in the presence of Jesus' disciples. The same can be said of the wedding miracle—by no means a private or secluded event. Likewise, the I-Am sayings must be considered the most theologically significant statements uttered by Jesus about himself anywhere in the four canonical Gospels. If Jesus indeed uttered them, how could they not have been included in the Synoptics? Conversely, the language and diction of Jesus in John is nearly identical to that of John the Baptist (see John 3:31–36) and the Fourth Evangelist. In that sense, the Johannine Jesus' discourses probably reflect the Evangelist's paraphrasing of Jesus' teachings rather than a historical rendering of such teachings. Further, they are far more self-referential than the kingdom sayings of the Synoptics and the Markan messianic secret, and one can understand how John's presentation of Jesus would call for explanations *other* than historical ones.

**Weaknesses.** As with the former issue, one of the primary weaknesses of questioning the origin of the distinctive Johannine material is that it also argues from silence. Such arguments can only be tenuous, and by definition they elude certainty. To argue that *everything significant* said or done by Jesus would be included in the Synoptics, or even in all the Gospel records, is likewise fallacious. The conclusion of John explicitly declares intentional selectivity (21:24–25), and the same was probably true of Mark and the other Gospels. It is also problematic to argue that Mark had access to *all* of Peter's preaching material (or whatever Mark's primary source might have been), let alone other narrative sources that might have been connected to particular geographical regions.<sup>23</sup> Further, if the patterning of the Johannine miracles in chapters 2, 4, 5, 9, and 11 seems to be crafted to augment the Markan narration of Jesus' ministry, the Cana miracles apparently fill out the early part of Jesus' ministry, and the other three contribute Judean miracles to the mix—perhaps reflecting the sentiment that Mark's rendering was incomplete. In that sense, the distinctive Johannine signs appear to have been presented as a means of filling some of the gaps left by the Markan project, and the final words of the first edition of John allude to that possibility. The Evangelist is apparently aware of other signs reported that “are *not in this book*” (in other words, “Yes, I know Mark is out there, and I know I am leaving things out, so stop reminding me”), “but *these* are written that you might believe” (in

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22. While the so-called Secret Gospel of Mark might betray an independent account of a resurrection narrative very much like the account in John 11, its existence is itself in doubt, thus offering little or no corroboration of the Johannine Lazarus narrative.

23. Angus J. B. Higgins raises significant questions about John's topography in his third chapter: “Is John the Fourth Gospel?” (1960, 63–82).

other words, “but the above material has a purpose *beyond* what Mark sought to accomplish”; John 20:30–31).

While the Johannine Jesus clearly speaks in the language of the Evangelist, this is not to say the Johannine paraphrase has no root in the ministry of the historical Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Markan Jesus also delivers several I-Am sayings, although they are not as fully developed as those in John.<sup>25</sup> What one *cannot* say is that Jesus’ I-Am sayings are absent from, or insignificant in, Mark, as the following list of similar ἐγώ εἰμι sayings of Jesus in Mark and John makes clear.

- ▶ ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε. In Mark 6:50, an epiphany (it is not a ghost; “It is I!”); in John 6:20, a theophany (“I Am!”) on the lake.
- ▶ An I-Am association with the burning bush, Abraham, and Exod 3:14–15 is declared by Jesus before the Jerusalem leaders (εἰμι understood in Mark 12:26, explicitly declared in John 8:58).
- ▶ I-Am claims are mentioned regarding alternative Messiah figures: false messiahs will say “I am the Christ” in Mark 13:6; John the Baptist confessed, “I am *not* the Christ!” in John 1:20.
- ▶ A christological claim in response to Pilate’s question (Mark 14:62: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” “I am!”; John 18:37: “Are you a king, then?” “You say that I am a king.”).

One could also argue that the I-Am sayings in John that make use of the predicate nominative are similar in their metaphorical character to the parables of the Synoptics (especially the shepherd/sheepgate imagery, truth and way emphases, the light-of-the-world motif, the vine/vineyard theme, the resurrection and life themes, and the bread and subsistence motif), although they clearly are not couched in the same parabolic form as the Synoptic teachings of Jesus. While it could be argued that Synoptic developments were constructed upon themes present in John, it is more likely to see the Johannine discourses as Christocentric developments of plausible Jesus sayings. What *cannot* be said is that the Johannine I-Am metaphors are at all missing from the Synoptics, as the following list reveals.

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24. Franz Mussner (1966) shows how the Johannine memory and paraphrastic work may have developed in distinctive, gnoseological terms.

25. See, for instance, Jesus’ response to the high priest in Mark 14:61–64, where, when asked if he were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus declared, “I Am! And you shall see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” At this, the high priest tore his garments and called for the blasphemy to be penalized. See also the words of Jesus at the sea crossing: ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (“It is I; fear not!” Mark 6:50), which are identical to the words of Jesus in John 6:20, despite contextual differences.

- ▶ ἄρτος: Jesus is tempted to turn stones into *bread* (Matt 4:1–4; Luke 4:1–4), and he feeds the multitudes with *bread* (Matt 14:13–21; 15:32–39; Mark 6:32–44; 8:1–10; Luke 9:10–17).
- ▶ φῶς: Jesus' disciples are the *light of the world* (Matt 5:14–16).
- ▶ θύρα: The (narrow) *gate* is emphasized (Matt 7:13–14; Luke 13:24) as the way to *life*.
- ▶ ποιμὴν: The parable of the *shepherd* and the sheep (Matt 18:10–14; Luke 15:3–7) emphasizes the care of Jesus for his fold.
- ▶ ἀνάστασις: Debates over the *resurrection* arise between Jesus and Jewish leaders (Matt 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–40), and the raising of Jarius's daughter (Matt 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56) brings life out of death.
- ▶ ὁδός: The “way of righteousness” (Matt 21:28–32) is advocated over “the way that leads to destruction” (Matt 7:13–14).
- ▶ ἀλήθεια: The way of God in *truth* is what Jesus teaches (Matt 22:16; Mark 12:14, 32; Luke 20:21).
- ▶ ζωή: The narrow way leads to *life* (Matt 7:14), and Jesus discusses what it means to inherit eternal life (Matt 19:16, 23–30; Mark 10:17, 23–31; Luke 18:18, 24–30).

Even some of the associated clusters of I-am metaphors can be found together in Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics. Indeed, while much material thought to be characteristic of Jesus found in the Synoptics is not found in the same way in John, it cannot be said that it is altogether missing. Some of it is situated in different sets of contexts and forms. John's tradition reflects a distinctively Christocentric rendering of Jesus' teachings, but that does not imply a radical disconnection from the Jesus represented by the Synoptics. If these and other Johannine aphoristic sayings in John would have been found in Mark, or even in the second-century Gospel of Thomas, it is doubtful they would have been passed over quite as readily in the selection of Jesus-sayings material.

#### 1.4. THE JOHANNINE JESUS SPEAKS AND ACTS IN THE MODE OF THE EVANGELIST

One of the great puzzlements of John's witness is that the Johannine Jesus speaks with the voice of the Evangelist. Then again, so does John the Baptist. The ending of John 3 is notoriously difficult when trying to ascertain who is speaking the last six verses. It appears the Baptist is continuing into a monologue, having moved into it from a dialogue with his own followers about Jesus being the Messiah. Then again, it sounds a great deal like the climactic christological declaration of Jesus in John 12:44–50, so one may be tempted to infer a resorting to the words of the Lord in John 3:31–36 without having marked narratologically a change of voice.

Or, is it the Evangelist's way of inserting the core of his own theological beliefs into the narrative, thereby granting the Baptist a pedestal on which to

declare the Evangelist's own theological convictions? After all, William Loader has shown effectively that these two passages comprise the "central structure" of John's Christology and that they provide a valuable lens for viewing the Son's saving mission from the Father and his ambivalent reception in the world, rife with implications (1984; 1989). However, if indeed it is the case that the Evangelist has imbued the Baptist's climactic witness to Jesus' mission with his own theological framework and terms, why not infer the same for the declaration of Jesus at the climax of his ministry and elsewhere in John? Especially when the language of John's Jesus is so dissimilar to that of the Synoptic Jesus, this makes it extremely difficult to imagine the *ipsissima verba* of the historical Jesus coming to us through the Johannine text. The words (and deeds) of Jesus in John betray such an obvious projection of the Johannine rendering that considerable caution must be exercised before attributing too much of the Johannine Jesus' teaching to the Jesus of history, proper.

**Strengths.** First, the Johannine witness comes to us explicitly from the perspective of postresurrection consciousness. Several times the point is made that the disciples did not "understand" the action or words of Jesus at the time, but later, after the resurrection, they understood fully what he was getting at (John 2:22; 12:16). Likewise, Jesus himself emphasizes that their comprehension will be fuller in the future, as mediated by the Holy Spirit, and this prediction is borne out in the perceptions of the Johannine narration (7:37–39; 13:7, 19–20; 14:25–31; 15:26–16:4; 16:12–16). From this perspective, the Johannine memory is pervasively influenced by later discovery, and this perspective by its own admission presents the past in the light of future valuations. In that sense, a "what really happened back then" mode of historicity is less important to the evangelist than the connecting of "what happened" to a "what it really meant ... *and means now*" form of narration.

A second question relates to the connections between the language and thought forms of the Johannine Jesus and those of the Johannine Evangelist. As mentioned above, the Johannine Jesus speaks in the language of the Evangelist, and impressive similarities can be observed between the corporate Johannine situation reflected by the Prologue, the witness of the Baptist, the interpretive work of the Evangelist, the words of Jesus, and the narration of Jesus' works. In contrast to the gnostic redeemer myth as the central history of religions origin of the mission of Jesus in John, its similarities are much closer to the prophet-like-Moses agency schema of Deut 18:15–22. Indeed, many of these features can be found throughout the Fourth Gospel, and it is indeed the case that the Evangelist's understanding of Jesus' ministry has been subsumed into this agency schema. Therefore, aspects of historicity must be read through such a missional and theological lens, which includes the following themes: (1) No one has seen God at any time, and only by the saving/revealing initiative of God can humanity be "drawn" to the Father. (2) Jesus came to the world as God's agent, revealing God's love and truth to the world. (3) The world's reception of the Revealer was ambivalent; some

believed, but some did not. (4) Those who knew God received the Revealer, but those who challenged the authenticity of Jesus' mission exposed their spiritual condition. (5) Jesus affirmed that he spoke and did only what he had seen and heard from the Father, attested by his words and works. (6) The world is therefore invited to respond believably to the Father's Agent as responding to the Father (Deut 18:15–22). (7) Those who believe receive life and further light; those who reject the Revealer seek to preserve the "comfort" of their darkness.

Nearly all these seven themes may be found in each of the above five portions of the Johannine Gospel, showing the degree to which the Evangelist's presentation of the ministry of Jesus and the witness of the Baptist had become integrated within his own ministry. This set of connections leads to a third question: To what extent does John's presentation of Jesus' teachings reflect the teaching of the historical Jesus as opposed to the Evangelist's teaching within the evolving history of his situation? Certainly the above outline reflects at least two levels of history (using Martyn's construct): the mission and reception of Jesus and his message; and the mission and reception of the Evangelist and his message. Indeed, nearly everything claimed for Jesus (he came unto his own and his own received him not, but as many as received the Gospel are given the power to become the children of God, John 1:12) can also be claimed for the Evangelist and the Johannine leadership. At least *four* crises within the Johannine situation can be inferred in the narration of the feeding and the sea crossing in John 6, not just the one in John 9.<sup>26</sup> In that sense, because John's narration addresses the evolving needs of the Johannine audience and represents the teaching ministry of the Evangelist, its reliability as a guide to the historical Jesus comes into question.

**Weaknesses.** The cardinal weakness, of course, of assuming that interpretive relevance completely eclipses originaive history is that it simply is not true. True historicity is never limited to the irrelevant, and to assert such misjudges the character of historiography itself. Every historical project distinguishes events of greater significance from their alternatives, and that implies subjectivity of judgment. Mark's narrative also distinguishes important events from others, so the question is better put as to whether the Markan selection of historically significant content is closer to the historical Jesus than that of the Johannine rendering. Further, to assume that an independent Gospel tradition either did not accommodate to Jesus' teachings or that it did not adapt Jesus' teachings to its own content needs is fallacious and unrealistic. Given the fact that the Johannine

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26. Note that (a) the desire for more loaves corrects Synoptic-type valuations of the feeding (not a *sêmeia* source); (b) the Jewish leaders' request for manna as Moses gave reflects debates over the authority of the Torah (Deut 8:3); (c) the disciples' being scandalized over eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus is aimed at docetizing Gentile believers; and (d) Peter's figurative "returning the keys to Jesus" corrects the proto-Ignatian tendencies of Diotrophes and his kin (these four crises behind John 6 are developed further in Anderson 1997).



Jesus' teachings are rendered in the modes of the Evangelist's own teaching ministry, the following features must be taken into consideration.

First, despite distinctively Johannine characteristics, there are dozens of aphorisms in John that sound very much like the sort of thing the historical Jesus would have said. Those mentioned above are only some of the most distinctive ones; others have been identified in analyses not noted by so-called historical Jesus studies. For instance, Wilbert Francis Howard lists no fewer than sixty aphorisms in John,<sup>27</sup> and Linda Bridges isolates twenty-six aphoristic sayings in John.<sup>28</sup> About half of those identified by Bridges are also selected by Drummond and Howard. Given the prolific inclusion of aphoristic sayings in John, it is extremely difficult to imagine *why* these sayings go unnoticed by Jesus scholars preferring instead the mid-second-century Gospel of Thomas with its gnostic proclivities over the Gospel of John in terms of historicity.<sup>29</sup> An explanation of that fact may lie in the tendency to analyze Johannine discourses as longer units, therefore missing aphorisms embedded within the larger contexts. Many of the above sayings, however, are not found in larger discourse sections, so the fact that they are overlooked entirely comes across as a striking oversight among otherwise astute critical scholars.

A second mistake in judgment is to infer that, because the historical Jesus spoke in characteristically terse, pithy aphorisms, he therefore did not deliver *any* longer discourses. Here a meaningful criterion for inclusion becomes used inappropriately as a measure of exclusion, which is faulty logic. Given that set A (aphorisms) overlaps with set B (Jesus' characteristic style of teaching), it does not follow that set C (longer discourses or alternative diction) cannot have had any overlap with set B. Put otherwise, how did Jesus hold the attention of multitudes for more than a few minutes at a time? If he held the attention of crowds for hours on end at times (as the feeding narratives and other sections in all four Gospels suggest), he must have delivered longer discourses as well as short aphorisms. Thus, aphoristic sayings were probably included in these longer discourses, but it is difficult to imagine that they were the *only* content or form delivered. Another variable also presents itself: Were Jesus' teachings delivered to his dis-

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27. John 1:51; 2:16, 19; 3:3, 6, 8; 4:14, 21, 23, 31, 34, 44, 48; 5:14, 17, 19, 23, 30, 40, 44; 6:27, 33, 35, 44, 63; 7:7, 17, 24, 37; 8:12, 26, 32, 34, 36, 51; 9:4, 39, 41; 11:25; 12:24, 25, 26, 32, 36, 44, 47; 13:15, 20, 34, 35; 14:1, 2, 6, 9, 15, 21, 27; 17:1; 18:36, 37. Howard (1931, 267) cites these verses as examples given by James Drummond (1904, 17–19). He also says, "Many more can be found, particularly in chaps. xiii–xvii. One of the most striking is xx. 29."

28. John 1:51; 2:19; 3:3, 5; 4:14, 35, 38; 5:19; 8:12, 34–35; 9:4–5; 11:25–26; 12:24–25, 35–36; 13:16, 20; 14:6; 15:13, 16, 20; 16:20–21, 23; 20:23, 27b, 29. See appendices A and B in Linda McKinnish Bridges 1987, 253–58.

29. Indeed, the Jesus Seminar's according of authentic Jesus sayings is more prolific in Thomas than all the canonical Gospels put together (see Anderson 2000b)—a surprising judgment for such a clearly gnostic second-century collection!



ciples identical to those addressed to the multitudes? Probably not. Therefore, to assert that Jesus' teachings are not at all represented in the distinctively Johannine presentation cannot be critically maintained.

A third fallacy is the assertion that a Johannine paraphrase of Jesus' teachings cannot represent the content or character of the teaching of the historical Jesus. Earlier impressions are not necessarily more authentic than distanced reflections, nor are historical presentations more authentic when not interpreted or paraphrased. Franz Mussner's intriguing monograph on the historical Jesus in the Gospel of John takes for granted a spiritualized reflection underlying the Johannine "memory," but he performs upon that premise a critical analysis of how the Johannine tradition might have developed as *anamnesis*.<sup>30</sup> In his analysis of key Johannine vocabulary terms ("gnoseological terminology"), Mussner applies the terms "to see," "to hear," "to come to know," "to testify," "to remember" (and to have brought to remembrance) to a realistic estimation of how the "historical reason" of the Evangelist might have developed. While Mussner's investigation is motivated by the desire to reconcile historicity with inspiration, he makes a significant set of phenomenological contributions. First, he acknowledges the distinctive features of Johannine spirituality and memory. Second, he describes how such memory from a distance really might have been experienced as a factor of the work of the *παράκλητος* calling to present earlier content for the needs of the emerging Johannine situation. Third, rather than seeing such developments as a historical disjunction with a more primitive Jesus tradition, he shows how continuity between earlier experiences and later perceptions may have emerged within the Johannine circle of leadership. In that sense, he gives us an alternative cognitive-critical model for historical investigation within a distinctive situation such as the Johannine.

While the Johannine Jesus clearly speaks in the language of the Evangelist, so do John the Baptist and others in the Fourth Gospel. This being the case, however, it cannot be said that aphoristic sayings of Jesus are totally absent. No fewer than seventy to eighty have been identified, and their embeddedness within longer sections may explain why some scholars have missed them. Nor can it be claimed that Jesus' characteristic aphorisms constituted the totality of everything he ever said. While the paraphrases of Jesus' teachings are a given in John, this is not to say, however, that they are completely truncated from the teaching ministry of the historical Jesus. This plank rests upon a significant problem, but it cannot be said to solidly support a total divorce between historical sayings of Jesus and later Johannine renderings. As Mark's source (and thus, Matthew's and Luke's) rendered Jesus' sayings meaningfully for the needs of emerging audiences

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30. Mussner's question, "Who is really speaking here?" is a good one (1966). Throughout the course of his analysis, he is able to show how both the historical Jesus *and* the paraphrastic Evangelist might have been implicated together.

in the church, so did the Johannine narrator, and in some ways the Johannine paraphrase may have been closer to original teachings of Jesus than scholars have thought.

#### 1.5. THE JOHANNINE MATERIAL IS RENDERED IN RESPONSE TO THE HISTORY OF THE JOHANNINE SITUATION

Because much of John's material shows evidence of development within the history of the Johannine situation, at least two levels of history must be considered in assessing the historical character of the Johannine material. In reality, *all* Gospel narrative is historical; the only question is, What *aspect* of history is represented regarding a particular passage or detail? As well as historical origins in the ministry of Jesus and within the influence of history of religions background, at least six or seven crises can be inferred within the Johannine situation. In the earlier period, the Palestinian period (30–70 C.E.), the first two crises appear. The first betrays tensions between northern Galileans or Samaritans and their southern neighbors, the Judeans, with the issue here apparently related to centralizing pressures and the rejection of northern perspectives by the Jerusalem-centered authorities. The second crisis betrays an interest in emphasizing that John the Baptist was not the Messiah, and it probably reflects dialogues seeking to convince Baptist adherents that Jesus was. In the middle period, the Asia Minor I period (70–85 C.E.), the Johannine Christians faced two more crises. The third crisis involved tensions with the local synagogue over the orthodoxy of the Jesus movement and their attempts to convince Jewish family and friends that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. The fourth involved hardship experienced at the hand of the local Roman presence under the reign of Domitian (81–96 C.E.), as residents of the empire were forced to offer emperor laud or suffer the consequences. The later period, the Asia Minor II period (85–100 C.E.), saw the emergence of multiple communities in the Johannine situation. The fifth crisis stemmed directly from the attempts of Gentile Christians to diminish the effects of required emperor laud. They taught a message of assimilation, legitimated by a nonsuffering and docetic Jesus. The sixth crisis reflects intramural tensions with rising institutionalism within the Christian movement, as the Johannine tradition calls for more egalitarian and familial approaches to church governance. The first edition of John was probably finalized around 80–85 C.E., and the Johannine Epistles were probably written in the interim between that time and the Gospel's finalization around 100 C.E. (see the table below). A seventh set of dialogues that spanned all six of the above crises involved dialectical interaction with other Gospel traditions. Within these evolving issues—largely sequential but also somewhat overlapping—the Johannine presentation of Jesus was formed in response to the needs of the churches, as were the Markan and other Gospel traditions.

## AN OUTLINE OF THE JOHANNINE SITUATION IN LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

Period 1: The Palestinian period, developing tradition (ca. 30–70 C.E.)

- Crisis A Dealing with north/south tensions (Galileans/Judeans)
- Crisis B Reaching followers of John the Baptist  
**The oral Johannine tradition develops.**

Period 2: The Asia Minor period I, the forging of community (ca. 70–85 C.E.)

- Crisis A Engaging local Jewish family and friends
- Crisis B Dealing with the local Roman presence  
**The first edition of the Johannine Gospel is prepared.**

Period 3: The Asia Minor period II, dialogues between communities (ca. 85–100 C.E.)

- Crisis A Engaging docetizing Gentile Christians and their teachings
- Crisis B Engaging Christian institutionalizing tendencies (Diotrephes and his kin)
- Crisis C Engaging dialectically Christians presentations of Jesus and his ministry (actually reflecting a running dialogue over all three periods)  
**The Epistles are written by the Johannine Elder, who then finalizes and circulates the testimony of the Beloved Disciple after his death.**

**Strengths.** Strict objectivity in historiography, as such, is of little value to interpreters. For instance, weeks and months of flat-line seismograph readings are objectively historical, but they are far less significant than the punctuating measures of seismic activity, even if they last for only moments. The relevant recording of the past always hinges upon inferred meanings for later generations, and in that sense the subjective inference of original significance is always determined in the light of an account's eventual impact and relevance. That being the case, many aspects of the Johannine memory appear to have been formed on at least two levels of history. What happened “even back then” (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) is brought to bear on “what’s happening now.”

Regarding crisis one, a crisis involving hegemonic actions and attitudes of Jerusalem-centered Judaism would have affected the preservation of material within the northern situation of the Evangelist. Whether he lived in Samaria, Galilee, or the Transjordan (Galilee seems the most plausible), the presentation of the *Ioudaioi* and leaders of Jerusalem, who reject the northern prophet and are scandalized by Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and claim of divine agency, would have borne resonance with the experience of northern Jewish populations travel-

ing to Jerusalem for festivals and worship several times a year. In that sense, the relevance of the northern prophet being rejected by the Judean authorities (John 4–5; 7–8) would have matched the experience of Galilean and Samaritan populations seeking to worship authentically as children of Israel. With relation to the second crisis—still in the first period—the Evangelist takes great pains to connect the Baptist's testimony with the authenticity of Jesus as a means either of reaching Baptist adherents or of cashing in on his authority in respect to his apologetic interests (20:30–31). The Johannine tradition is distinctive in this matter, and it is possible that some of the Johannine leadership originally were followers of the Baptist but left him and followed Jesus. Indeed, John 1 portrays Jesus' first disciples as such. Therefore, the Evangelist's vested interest should be kept in mind regarding the Baptist material in John.

The middle period of the Johannine situation appears to have involved the movement of the Evangelist to one of the mission churches, probably in Asia Minor; several details bear witness to such a possibility. First, the explanation of Jewish customs interprets the story of Jesus for a Gentile audience. Second, the translation of Aramaic words into Greek connects the original language of the Lord with later Hellenistic audiences. Third, tensions with Jewish and Roman leaders in the earlier period of the Christian movement find resonance with what is happening in the fifth and sixth decades of the Johannine situation. With the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., religious authority in Judaism shifted from the cultic religion of Jerusalem to scriptural religion practiced more broadly. As the emphasis upon Jewish biblical faith continued to collide with Jesus adherents claiming his divine agency and status rooted in Deut 18:15–22 and Christian worship (John 1:1–18), local religious authorities understandably sought to retard the Jesus movement. The Birkat Haminim of the Jamnia Council codified some of the threats of expulsion that were already at work in Asia Minor and elsewhere, and the Johannine historical project connected religious hostility in the past with the impending crisis in the present. “Even back then” believers were put out of the synagogue for confessing Jesus openly (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and this historical marker connects earlier memories with present experience. In that sense, it reflects the emerging process of self-identification, as Johannine Christianity individuates away from its Jewish origins. This was the first crisis within this period. The second crisis within this period involved the hardship received at the hand of the local Roman presence, intensifying the requirement to express loyalty to the empire by requiring public emperor laud. Domitian (81–96 C.E.) even required his Roman subjects to refer him as “Lord and God,” thus providing a backdrop to the confession of Thomas and the presentation of Pilate in John 18–20. Against these likely Jewish and Roman historical backgrounds, the Johannine narration must be read as reflecting a contextual history of delivery rather than an originitive history alone. It was probably at the end of this phase in the history of the Johannine situation that the first edition of John was written.

The later period of the Johannine situation brought with it two more crises (85–100 C.E.): the crisis of having to confront docetic tendencies among Gentile Christian teachers advocating a doctrine of assimilation with Rome, and the resultant remedy to Docetism: the emergence of proto-Ignatian hierarchies within the Christian movement. As a result, the emphasis on water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus (John 19:34–35) emphasizes the physicality of his having suffered, and this antidocetic emphasis is the acute occasion for asserting the eyewitness origin of the Johannine tradition. Indeed, nearly all the incarnational and antidocetic material in John can be found in the supplementary material added to the first edition (including 1:1–18; 6; 15–17; 21; and eyewitness and Beloved Disciple passages).<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple speaks with relevance to issues surrounding emerging institutionalization in the late first-century church. Here investigations of the “historical Peter” and the “historical Beloved Disciple,” seeking to prove or disprove John’s historicity, miss the point entirely. The seventh set of dialogues was less of a crisis and more of a running dialogue with alternative Synoptic traditions. This being the case, at least some of John’s presentation of Jesus history emerges in dialogue with alternative perspectives. Historiography is itself a rhetorical venture, and the primary historical interest involves unpacking the meaning of these figures’ authority being yoked to the addressing of needs within the historical Johannine situation.<sup>32</sup>

In these and other ways, the Johannine memory is thoroughly engaged in history, but the question is: *Which* history? All of John relates to history; the question is whether particular material reflects originative history in the ministry of Jesus, the religious history of ideas and typologies attached to Jesus narratives, the history of the Johannine tradition itself, or an echo of the historical Johannine situation evolving from one period to another. The fact that audiences in the history of the Johannine situation were being addressed by the Johannine narration raises serious questions about the degree to which the Jesus of history is being presented here, as opposed to John’s Jesus simply being a projection of the emerging needs of the Johannine historical situation.

**Weaknesses.** Again, like many of the previous issues, some merit is granted the concern, but the fallacy comes when an overly reductionistic approach to the Johannine tradition displaces other plausible aspects of Johannine historicity. Two points deserve to be made here. First, the Johannine tradition is not the only Gospel tradition crafting the words and deeds of Jesus to address the later needs of the Johannine audience. Mark too, according to Papias, preserved the preaching of Peter, which itself was reportedly crafted to meet the needs of the church. One might infer several “craftings” of Mark’s Jesus tradition to address

31. For a two-edition outline of Johannine composition, see Anderson 2006b, 193–95.

32. Kevin Quast develops this view (1989), as structure and charisma complement each other within the Johannine narrative and situation.

the needs of the early church: the way of the cross and costly discipleship; anticipations of the return of Christ; the messianic secret as an antidote to messianic embellishments; and exhortations to be faithful in following Jesus regardless of apparent outcomes. Likewise, Matthew's tradition crafted a Jesus relevant to the teaching needs of Matthean sectors of Christianity, demonstrating Jesus as the authentically Jewish Messiah, and Luke constructed a portrayal of Jesus presenting him as a just and righteous man as a way of minimizing Roman criticisms or concerns about the Jesus movement. In these ways the Synoptic traditions also applied originative histories of Jesus to emerging histories of their respective situations, so John is not alone in such a venture.

A second point is to emphasize the fallacy of assuming that, because John's narration shows signs of later developments, it cannot have represented anything historical about the events in Jesus' ministry. The inference of a history of tradition development does not demonstrate the absence of originative history. Put otherwise, eventual relevance in itself does not negate historical origination. Indeed, the emerging Johannine narrative certainly evolved into its eventual form, but arguing that its originative history was *not* rooted in events or reflections upon them is impossible to demonstrate or maintain. This is especially the case when several aspects of John's presentation of Jesus square very closely with the basic historic elements of the Synoptic tradition, despite not having been dependent upon them.

First, Jesus' cleansing of the temple is included in John as well as the other Gospels, and while John's rendering is at the beginning rather than the end of Jesus' ministry, this independent narration arguably goes back to an originative incident. Second, Jesus' teaching on the love of God in John is parallel with, though not dependent on, the presentation of the same theme in the Synoptics. While the *Abba*-Father language of Mark is probably closer to the language of the historical Jesus than the Johannine Father-Son relationship, the two are nonetheless close and can be said to reflect consonance with each other as windows into the sort of relationship Jesus plausibly described. Third, Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and challenge of religious authority is presented as clearly in John as it is in the Synoptics, despite its many distinctive features. Fourth, the passion narrative in John is very similar to those of the other Gospels, yet John's rendering is also different enough to evince Synoptic derivation. Just because the sequence is the same between the entry, the supper, the garden scene, the arrest, two trials (one Jewish and one Roman), the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and his resurrection and appearances, this does *not* imply common source dependence. Rearranging the order of *any* of these elements in the stories does not work. The trial cannot come after the death, nor can the garden scene come after the arrest, nor can the supper come after trials. A more plausible explanation is that the Johannine and Synoptic traditions represent parallel narrations of a common set of events impressed upon the memories of different traditions,

and this is why even Bultmann had to infer a passion source underlying John.<sup>33</sup> The Johannine narration cannot be explained adequately on any other basis. For these and other reasons, while the historical development of the Johannine situation must be considered when analyzing John's historicity, it cannot in and of itself negate any theory of Johannine origins, whether it be rooted in a reflection upon the ministry of Jesus or in an imaginary novelization of later Christian beliefs.

#### 1.6. THE JOHANNINE EVANGELIST SPIRITUALIZES AND THEOLOGIZES ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSES

The distinction made by Clement, that while the Synoptics wrote about the bodily aspects of Jesus' ministry, John wrote a "spiritual Gospel," has provided a heuristic key for dehistoricizing the Johannine witness. Based upon this inference, differences between John and the Synoptics have been largely ascribed to Synoptic factuality versus Johannine theologization. With regard to the message of Jesus, the Johannine paraphrase of Jesus' teachings and the spiritualization of how he was received (both positively and negatively) bolster this move. With respect to Jesus' ministry, his signs are clearly discussed symbolically and theologically, and the revelatory function of the signs—including their pointing to the mission of Jesus—becomes their primary interpretive value in John. And, with regard to distinctive aspects of chronology or narration in John, such as the timing of the temple cleansing and the Last Supper, "the theologizing work of the Evangelist" receives attribution as the basis for Johannine peculiarities. Scholars explain that John does not present a historical challenge to the Synoptic tradition; John's presentation reflects *theological* interests rather than *historical* ones. The question is the degree to which this thesis holds.

**Strengths.** Indeed, the Fourth Evangelist is the most spiritualizing and theologizing among the four canonical Gospel writers, and since the second century C.E. he has simply been called "the theologian." In John, the theological import of Jesus' teachings—highlighted by the I-Am sayings and the Son's relation to the Father—form the basis for most of the christological debates within the history of Christian theology. As mentioned above, the origin of that work must be credited as including centrally the theologizing work of the Evangelist. Likewise, the presentation of the theological significance of Jesus' miracles is also rooted in the reflective process of the Evangelist's thinking. Even the emphasis upon the existential value of Jesus' signs betrays the theological engagement of the Evangelist's thinking, operating on a stage 5 level of faith (Conjunctive Faith, according to James Fowler's approach), contrasted to less dialectical and more conventional

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33. For further details, see Anderson 1996, 33–36.

ones.<sup>34</sup> On theologizing explanations of John's distinctive chronology, the "paschal theology of the Evangelist" gets credited with the placement of the temple cleansing early and the location of the Last Supper on Thursday, the day the paschal lambs were slain. These moves preserve the three-against-one approach to the Johannine/Synoptic problem, alleviating historical embarrassment from the Johannine distinctives. If John's differences of presentation were rooted in theological interests rather than historical differences, the four canonical Gospels can more easily be harmonized. The theological valuation of John's witness thus displaces apparent historical incongruities, and Clement's dictum finds its destined modernistic application.

**Weaknesses.** While Jesus' teachings and deeds are indeed spiritualized and theologized in John, Clement was not declaring John to be historically inferior. The word translated "facts" (as in, the Synoptics preserved the "facts" in contrast to John) is actually *σωματικά*, referring to the bodily aspects of Jesus' ministry as contrasted to the spiritual perspective of John. In that sense, it is a mistake to interpret Clement as making a historical judgment about John or the Synoptics. Clement was not a modern positivist. He was simply declaring, nearly a century after the four Gospels' completion, his inference of their tone and approach, not respective degrees of historical reliability. Therefore, to employ Clement's dictum as a license for dehistoricizing the Johannine witness falls flat from a critical standpoint. It was nothing of the sort originally, but it came to be used in the modern era as a means of bolstering a three-against-one marginalization of John before Markan priority was established. In the light of a bi-optic approach to the Johannine/Markan analysis, the spiritualistic discounting of John's distinctive presentation no longer holds.

A second problem emerges when seeking to explain John's chronological differences on the basis that the Evangelist's "paschal theology" caused the moving of the temple cleansing early and the location of the Last Supper on a Thursday rather than on a Friday. The first fact to consider is that the Evangelist cannot really be said to have much of a paschal theology to begin with. Indeed, John the Baptist declares at the beginning, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36), but the Lamb of God theme occurs nowhere else in the rest of the Gospel. The Johannine Apocalypse culminates with Christ as the victorious Lamb, but it is a mistake to connect the Johannine Apocalypse and Gospel too closely together, as though one can be read through the other. John has no explicit paschal theology other than the witness of the Baptist in the first chapter, so this cannot be said to have been a pervasive interest or investment of the Evangelist. It could be argued that the interpretation of Caiaphas's willingness to "sacrifice" Jesus instead of risking a Roman onslaught as an economy of violence

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34. See cognitive-critical approaches to biblical analysis in Anderson 2004a; 1996, 136–65, as well as in Anderson, Ellens, and Fowler 2004.



reflects a Johannine atonement theology (11:45–57), but the thrust of the larger passage is more political than theological. Of the paschal imagery present in John, Jesus is more clearly portrayed as the Good Shepherd, the True Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. The pastoral image of Christ as Shepherd in John is far stronger than the presentation of Jesus as the Lamb, so it thus is not a strong basis upon which to build any sort of a heuristic platform. Further, as the outline of John's central christological structure above shows, it centers not around atonement theology (that is more properly Pauline) but around revelation. Imputing Pauline or Synoptic atonement theology onto that of the Fourth Evangelist is itself an unfounded move.

A third weakness with this particular approach is that it assumes an absence of otherwise historical factors in the location of the Johannine temple cleansing and Last Supper. Indeed, rhetorical interests are present in the construction of all narratives, historical and otherwise, but to assert that no historical-type awareness or motivation is evident in the Johannine ordering and presentation of these events simply is not true. Regarding the temple cleansing, the following apparently historical associations are present. First, the unit (John 2:12–25) is hemmed by chronotopic markers. The beginning of the passage bears three chronological details: μετὰ τοῦτο (“after this”) is a general reference, not necessarily a chronological one, as is καὶ ἐκεῖ ἔμειναν οὐ πολλὰς ἡμέρας (“and there [in Capernaum] they remained a just few days,” 2:12). The next statement, however, is more particular: καὶ ἐγγὺς ἦν τὸ πάσχα τῶν Ἰουδαίων (“And the Passover of the Jews was near”) locates the event at a particular festival time, although which Passover season is meant may be debated.<sup>35</sup> The end of the passage also bears with it chronological references, again mentioning the Passover feast and the σημεῖα (“signs”) he had been doing (2:23). Whether the Evangelist used these references with particularly chronological meanings in mind, and even if they were wrong, it cannot be said that historical-type details are entirely missing. They are present at least in general ways.

A second fact is that it cannot be claimed that the temple cleansing unit has no references to the narration of events before and after. First, the way to Jerusalem (via Capernaum, 2:12) again draws in the mother of Jesus, who had just been mentioned in 2:1–5. While she is not mentioned as being present in Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples are. At the beginning of John 3, however, Nicodemus

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35. The question of which Passover festival this may have been is relevant here; if indeed the reference were to the same Passover mentioned in John 11:55, a theory of transposition would be required. Such is the view of Barnabas Lindars, for instance. In addition to these references, a third mention of the proximity of the Passover is found in John 6:4, but in none of them is an explicit connection made with the paschal atonement theology. The unwitting prolepsis of Caiaphas in 11:50 is a response to a reference to Roman violence and destruction, and this theme of impending political violence is more closely associated with ἐγγὺς τὸ πάσχα in John than an inferred Pauline atonement motif (see Anderson 1996, 172–73).

makes reference to Jesus' "signs," and this statement (in addition to 2:23) appears to include the temple cleansing as a σημεῖον. These references, of course, are not necessarily made with the temple cleansing in mind, but in John 4 Jesus appears to be traveling from the south to the north (thus having to pass through Samaria), and the events in John 5 are inexplicable without Jesus having been to Jerusalem before. Already in John 5:18 the Jerusalem-based leaders are presented as wanting to kill Jesus, and if the only thing he had done in Jerusalem up until that time was the healing of the paralytic, this extremely hostile reaction is hard to explain. The desire to put Jesus to death is again mentioned in John 7, and without an early temple cleansing in the mind of the narrator it is difficult to imagine why these references would have been mentioned during the *early* ministry of Jesus. Again, the point is not to argue John's chronological veracity; it is to challenge the often-made assertion that the early placement of John's temple cleansing bore no chronological/sequential associations with it.

A third difficulty with the current "consensus" is that several aspects of the Markan locating of the temple incident at the end of Jesus' ministry do not appear to be ordered by "factual" knowledge or information. For one thing, Mark locates all the Jerusalem events at the end of Jesus' ministry, as though he only visited the city once during his entire ministry. John's presentation of several visits to Jerusalem indeed seems more plausible than the Markan singular visit. Mark also locates nearly all the judgment and apocalyptic teachings of Jesus as happening on that eventful visit to Jerusalem, but such could simply be a factor of conjecture or climactic narration, clumping material together at the end, rather than motivated by factual information. Further, Mark mentions only one Passover, the one at which Jesus was killed, implying that Jesus' ministry and opposition were all mounted within a relatively short period of time rather than over a period of several years. This could have been the case, but John's rendering here seems more plausible. Another oddity is that Mark's presentation of the events narrated in the Johannine rendering of the temple cleansing are more fragmented than they are in John. For instance, the mention of the event itself is in Mark 11:15–17 (cf. John 2:14–17), while the challenging of Jesus' authority comes in a return visit in Mark 11:27–33 (cf. John 2:18–22). Still less integrated are two references to Jesus' declaration that he would raise up "this temple" in three days: that made by those who stood before the chief priests and the Jewish council (Mark 14:58); and that made by those who observed him hanging on the cross (Mark 15:30). Interestingly, while both of these statements assert that Jesus had made this declaration, he is only *portrayed* as having done so in John 2:19. Because the material in John 2:13–25 is more integrated, and the parallel material in Mark is more disintegrated and diffuse, it cannot be said that the best explanation for the differences is Mark's "factuality" at the expense of John's.

A fourth problem with the "scholarly consensus" that Mark's rendering is rooted in objective fact and John's is rooted in spiritualizing fancy is that John's

presentation correlates impressively with several aspects of historicity. First, the reference to the forty-six years it had taken to reconstruct the temple locates the event around the year 27 C.E., toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as Herod had begun the construction of the temple around 19 B.C.E.<sup>36</sup> Further, this particular detail in John 2:20, declared on behalf of the Jewish leaders, is not explicable on the basis of numerology or semeiology; it is mentioned simply as an "innocent" objection to the three-day reconstruction reference. Second, the mention of the disciples' later remembering his word, after the resurrection (2:21–22), appears to require a considerable passing of time rather than just a few days. Again, John's presentation could have been wrong, but it cannot be said that the Synoptic/Johannine differences are simply due to factuality versus spirituality. A third fact is also interesting here: Papias's opinion that Mark preserved Peter's teaching favorably—but in the *wrong order*—is attributed to "the Elder" (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15). Was this the Johannine Elder, reflecting a second-century opinion that Mark's conjectural ordering of events deserved to be set straight? If so, John's presentation may have been a corrective in the name of a *historical* opinion in opposition to the Markan rendering. For these reasons at least, the temple-cleansing differences between John and Mark cannot be said to confirm a "factual" Mark in opposition to a "spiritual" John. After all, John too is *somatic*, as Origen declares (*Commentary on John* 1.9).

But what about the dating of the Last Supper? Is not Mark's presentation of the event as a Passover meal a more likely timing than John's rendering of the event on Thursday night? After all, Mark 14:12–16 records that the Last Supper was being prepared on the day the paschal lambs were killed, the Day of Preparation, making it a more formal Passover meal. Supposedly, John's location of the event on the eve of the Day of Preparation (John 19:14, 31, 42) would have been motivated by the paschal theologizing interests of the Evangelist over and against the superior chronology of Mark. Two major problems accompany this view. First, if the Passover were observed on the Sabbath, it seems highly unlikely that Jesus' crucifixion would have happened on the Sabbath, and if Mark's rendering in chapter 14 is correct, this would have been the case. John's report of the sense of urgency that the bodies needed to be removed from the crosses *before* the Sabbath seems far more likely. Another problem with the Markan rendering is that Mark presents the appearance narratives as happening on the "first day," the day after the Sabbath (as does John), which would mean that Jesus was only in the tomb overnight (Mark 16:1–2, 9). Given Mark 14 on its own, to allow three days in the tomb, the Johannine rendering is required. Yet Mark 15:42 claims that Jesus was actually crucified on the Day of Preparation, thus contradicting the earlier Markan passage that the meal was on the same day. Like Jesus' words about the three-day raising up of the temple, this is not just a matter of John

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36. See Higgins 1960, 44–46, and Josephus, *A.J.* 15.11.1.

against Mark; it also is a matter of Mark against Mark. Then again, if the Passover was held the day before the Sabbath that year, the above could be more easily harmonized. Another fact is that “eating the Passover” would not necessarily have been confined to one day; it could have involved a week-long set of celebrations. The problem for such a move is that John 19:31 declares that the Sabbath was a “high day” that year, implying that the Passover and Sabbath were on the same day.

A second problem with preferring a Passover meal setting over a less formalistic meal in John is that the former too easily can be explained as an adapted meal conforming to evolving Christian cultic practice. John’s assertion that Jesus did not baptize (4:2) and the omission of the words of the institution of the Eucharist in John 13 cannot be explained on the basis of “spiritualization” or the representation of evolving cultic practice. Indeed, John goes *against* those cultic developments within the broader Christian movement, but the Markan rendering advances them. For these and other reasons, the primary examples used to explain Synoptic/Johannine differences on the basis of factuality versus spiritualization fall far short of a compelling critical argument.

The “theological interests of the Evangelist” is one of the most inexact and carelessly used explanations given among scholars who do not otherwise know what to do with a particular Johannine feature (see Anderson 2006c). Rarely is its use subjected to critical assessment, and seldom are the bases for its use laid out clearly. The dehistoricizing treatment of the above issue is a telling example. First, despite John making no mention of the paschal lambs being killed, this exclusively Markan theme (Mark 14:12) is carelessly imputed into the Fourth Evangelist’s motives despite the relative dearth of paschal theology in John.<sup>37</sup> Second, the issue is set up as John versus Mark, when Mark also disagrees with Mark. Third, the more cultic Passover meal and institutionalizing rendering in Mark gets precedence over John’s more innocent presentation, against the criterion of dissimilarity. Fourth, these specious moves are amassed as critical evidence illustrating a prime case of Johannine ahistoricity, functioning to deconstruct other apparently historical Johannine material. If these same sorts of moves were made *in favor of* John’s historicity or apostolic authorship, critical scholars would certainly raise objections—yet, as challenges to its historicity, it appears they are given a critical pass.

A final fallacy also accompanies this discussion: the assumption that theologization and spiritualization necessarily imply ahistoricity. Indeed, the spiritualization of earlier events calls into question the memory of purported events,

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37. The witness of the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, 36), is more fittingly a reference to Isa 53:7, where it is the suffering and faithfulness of Israel as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh through which the world is redeemed, than a paschal atonement theme.

and evolving narrations may have supplanted earlier renderings, but to say that symbolization, spiritualization, or theologization displaces originative history is terribly flawed as a historiographic procedure. Apply the premise to any subject, and the extent of its fallacious character becomes evident. Does the phenomenon of “war-story embellishment” prove that a war never happened or that there was no connection between originative events and later reflections? Do symbolized expansions upon traumatic experiences prove that they never happened? The embellishment of events does not negate their ontology. Indeed, the case can be made that dialectical processes of thought and reflection betray a first-order level of encounter rather than second-order reasoning (Anderson 2004a). For these and other reasons, equating John’s spiritualization of events in the ministry of Jesus cannot be considered a solid proof of its ahistoricity.

In summary, of the various planks in the platform contributing to the dehistoricization of John, *none* of the strengths of these positions are decidedly compelling. Problems indeed are inferred, and ones that need to be addressed critically, but John’s aspects of historicity are as disruptive for the purported consensus as obstacles to John’s historicity were to the traditionalist view. Therefore, a blunt appraisal of John’s ahistoricity is devoid of nuance and fails to account for dozens of exceptions to its claims. For this reason the genuinely critical scholar cannot be satisfied with the purported critical consensus.

#### PLANKS IN PLATFORM B: THE DE-JOHANNIFICATION OF JESUS

Attempting to employ the Gospel of John for Jesus studies is indeed problematic. A Jesus who possesses sole control over his future and who “knows” what is in the hearts of humans is hard to equate with the incarnation. Likewise, it is difficult to know how to square the Logos, who was with God in the beginning and through whom all was created, with the historical Jesus who suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. John’s historicity seems to have been subsumed into John’s Christology, and thus John is thought to provide very little insight into what the historical Jesus may have been like. After John is removed from the database used to reconstruct the “historical” Jesus, criteria are established that function to separate John further from historical Jesus quests. The problem, however, is that this move is circular in its conception and its exercise. This being the case, the planks in the platform of the de-Johannification of Jesus must also be assessed critically to determine whether John’s marginalization from Jesus studies is warranted or not.

##### 2.1. JOHN’S SIMILARITIES WITH THE SYNOPTICS—ESPECIALLY MARK

An obverse problem of John’s differences from the Synoptics is the fact that John is also very similar to them. Many similarities between John and Mark can be

found, and despite the sustained objections of P. Gardner-Smith, Raymond E. Brown, and D. Moody Smith, such scholars as C. K. Barrett, Franz Neirynck, and Thomas Brodie have inferred John's spiritualized use of Mark.<sup>38</sup> The significance of this inference as it relates to Jesus, John, and history is that, if John is a spiritualization of Mark, this would account for a major factor in the origin of John's tradition. On one hand, seeing John as an expansion upon Mark would bolster interests in securing a historical basis for John. On the other hand, dependence upon Mark casts John in a derivative relation to Mark rather than having an original claim to its own tradition. Whatever the case, John's many differences from Mark continue to pose difficulties for a Markan dependence view and is, in fact, one of its major vulnerabilities.

**Strengths.** The hypothesis that John is derivative from Mark has several strengths, although it is by no means embraced by the majority of Johannine scholars. The first strength involves the similar beginnings and endings of Mark and John. Both begin (after the Johannine Prologue) with the beginning of the "Gospel" and the ministry of John the Baptist, and both end with the passion, death, resurrection, and appearances narratives. Second, similarities in the passion accounts are impressive. Both begin with an acclaimed entry to Jerusalem, a Last Supper, prayer and arrest in the garden, two trials (a Jewish and a Roman trial), the crucifixion and death, the resurrection, and, finally, appearance to women. Third, both have an impressive number of general similarities around the feeding of the multitude, the sea crossing, further discussions of the feeding, and the confession of Peter. Fourth, multiple particular similarities (distinctive to Mark and John) exist regarding graphic detail (the mention of two hundred and three hundred δηνάριον; the grass upon which the people sat; "Holy One of God" as a christological title; and the use of Isa 6:9–10 to explain the Galileans' unbelief). These similarities imply some form of contact between these traditions. Fifth, some aspects of John's witness show signs of being crafted for readers and hearers of Mark. The references to the adverse reception in Nazareth and the timing of the Baptist's imprisonment point to familiarity with the Markan witness,<sup>39</sup> as do the clarification of the first two signs performed in Galilee (John 2:11; 4:54) and the acknowledgement that other signs were performed by Jesus not reported in "this book" (20:30). For these and other reasons, some scholars have inferred a derivative relationship between the Johannine and Markan traditions.

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38. When comparing the theories of Gardner-Smith 1938, Brown 2003, and Smith 2001 with Barrett 1978, Neirynck 1977, and Brodie 1993, the weaknesses of Markan-dependence theories appear greater than those of independence theories.

39. Richard Bauckham's essay "John for Readers of Mark" (1997, 147–72) raises the sort of possibility that Ian Mackay (2004) argues in greater detail. Johannine-Markan traditional contact, however, need not imply derivation.

**Weaknesses.** The problem with such a view, however, is that despite all these similarities, none of them is identical. Mark has “green” grass; John has “much” grass. While “Holy One of God” is used as a title for Jesus in both Gospels, in Mark it is uttered by the demoniac (Mark 1:24), in John by Peter (John 6:69). In fact, of the forty-five similarities between John 6 and Mark 6 and 8, *none* of them is identical.<sup>40</sup> Further, the placement of the temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry argues strongly against John’s dependence upon Mark. After an extensive analysis of John’s relation to the Synoptics, in particular Mark, Moody Smith resolutely affirms the same conclusion that Perceival Gardner-Smith came up with in 1938: if the Fourth Evangelist was aware of Mark or the other Synoptics extensively, he disagreed with them at almost every turn.<sup>41</sup> Certainly if there were some contact or familiarity, the relation of John to Mark was nowhere near the much closer connections evidenced between Mark and the other two Gospels. A further problem is that much of the Johannine archaeological and geographical detail is found only in John, so the Markan tradition cannot have been a source of the majority of the Johannine material most likely to be considered historical. For these reasons, Johannine familiarity with Mark cannot be ruled out, but dependence upon Mark can. Therefore, John’s independence from Mark should be regarded as nondependence, or autonomy, rather than isolation.

## 2.2. JOHN’S COMPOSITION: DIACHRONIC OR SYNCHRONIC?

John’s composition has been a considerable interest of Johannine scholars due to its many perplexities (*aporias*). First, formal and vocabulary differences exist between the Prologue (1:1–18) and the rest of John’s narrative. The Prologue is poetic and stanza-based in its form (suggesting a worship setting in its origin), whereas the rest of John is prose. A second perplexity is that several odd progressions require attention: chapters 5 and 7 are in Jerusalem, while chapters 4 and 6 are in Galilee; after Jesus says “let us leave” in 14:31, it takes three chapters for them to arrive at the garden (18:1); John 20:31 seems to have been an original first ending, with chapter 21 added at a later time; Mary is mentioned in chapter 11 as the one who anointed the feet of Jesus, but she does not actually do so until chapter 12; Jesus says “none of you asks where I am going” in 16:5, yet Thomas had just asked him about where he was going and how to know the way in 14:5; finally, neither 5:4 nor 7:53–8:11 is found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of John, suggesting at least some later textual additions. These perplexities

40. For the particulars, see tables 10–15 in Anderson 1996, 187–90. See also appendix 1 below.

41. After a thorough review of the literature, D. Moody Smith (2001) sides with Gardner-Smith, although with the move of Raymond Brown (2003) toward considering “cross-influence” between John and other traditions, a theory of “interfluence” deserves development.



raise more than a few questions about John's order and composition, and some scholars have advocated a diachronic history of John's composition. The relevant question here involves the degree to which John's narration represents a coherent presentation of Jesus or whether it represents a fragmented one, composed of alien material and disparate sources possessing varying degrees of historicity.

**Strengths.** The greatest of Johannine diachronic composition schemes is the theory devised by Rudolf Bultmann. He argued for three primary sources from which the Evangelist derived his Gospel material, for the constructive work of the Evangelist that then fell into a disordered state, and for the reconstructive (and reordering) work of the redactor who prepared the Fourth Gospel into the perplexing state in which we find it today.<sup>42</sup> This being the case, a *σημεῖα* source provided the distinctive signs found in John, a gnostic revelation-sayings source availed the Evangelist's distinctive I-Am sayings explaining their origin, and an individuated passion narrative made it possible for John's distinctive material to be gathered without the Evangelist's having been an eyewitness. A redactor then added his own material, rearranging the text that had fallen into disorder and reconciling the Johannine Gospel with Synoptic renderings and ecclesial interests. Bultmann's source-critical inferences were based on stylistic, contextual, and theological bases, and they accounted for several perplexing Johannine features: (1) the rough transitions in John, and even some smooth ones; (2) the origins of John's christological tensions, as these were due to dialogues between sources and Evangelist and redactor; and (3) the inferred historical origins of John's material, which was derivative from other sources and from mythological origins, from which a distinctive narrative was constructed. Thus John's distinctive presentation of Jesus was accounted for, and John's theological-rather-than-historical character was explained. Other diachronic schemes have abounded, but Bultmann's represents the zenith of modern Johannine diachronic reconstruction.

**Weaknesses.** Despite the brilliance of Bultmann's approach, it falls flat when tested on the basis of its own evidence. Regarding the differences between "Hellenised Aramaic" and "Semitising Greek," when *all* of Bultmann's stylistic evidence is gathered and applied to John 6 as a case study (the very place where four of his five sources should be discernibly present), its distribution is not only nonconvincing, but it is nonindicative. Other than the fact of a narrator's stylistic work being obvious (which does not imply the use of alien material), the rest of the features are evenly distributed throughout John 6.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, contextual reasons for inferring a disordering and a reordering of John's text are terribly weak. Bultmann misses the irony of Jesus' knowing response to the crowd's question

42. See especially the analysis of Bultmann's program (1971) by Moody Smith 1965.

43. See an analysis of the viability of Bultmann's evidence on its own terms in Anderson 1996, 70–136.



about his arrival in John 6:26 (“When did you get here?” as in “When’s lunch?”) and infers instead a displacement of material. His inference of a disordered John 4; 6; 5; 7 makes better sense if it is seen as the insertion of John 6 into an earlier version of the Gospel.<sup>44</sup> Theologically, John’s christological tensions should be viewed not as dialogues between sources and editors but as a function of the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist. In that sense, these tensions are *internal* to the thinking of the Evangelist rather than external. While Bultmann is happy to describe modern theologians as dialectical thinkers, he ironically fails to allow a first-century theologian the same privilege. With relation to the Evangelist’s subject, Jesus, this dialectical level of engagement may reflect proximity to Jesus rather than distance.

As mentioned above, the most plausible and least speculative of Johannine composition theories involves a two-edition theory of composition, inferring that a first edition of John was finalized around 80–85 C.E. and a final edition compiled around 100 C.E. by the redactor after the death of the Beloved Disciple (implied in John 21:18–24). Material added to the final edition would have included the Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, and Beloved Disciple and eyewitness passages. *With* Bultmann here, the editor appears to have added several sections that are quite similar to 1 John, so it is plausible to identify the author of the Johannine Epistles as the final compiler of the Johannine Gospel. This would explain the third-person references to the purported author and appeals to authority otherwise (1 John 1:1–3, etc.). If something like this two-edition process took place, the Johannine Gospel was written *before and after* the Epistles (which were probably written between 85 and 95 C.E.). What can be inferred in the first-edition material, then, is the concern to present Jesus apologetically as the Jewish Messiah in response to engagement with the local synagogue presence, while the supplementary material shows signs of antidocetic emphases on the suffering and humanity of Jesus, the incarnated Word.

### 2.3. THE LATENESS OF JOHN AND HISTORICAL VALIDITY

A central plank in the platform arguing for the de-Johannification of Jesus results from the belief that John was finalized last among the canonical Gospels. Indeed, both the traditional view and the consensus of most Johannine scholars agree that John was finalized last among the four Gospels, and plausible estimations locate John’s finalization around 100 C.E. While several scholars in recent years have

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44. This is the view of Barnabas Lindars 1972, 46–54; independently of one another, John Ashton and I came to the same favorable impressions of its prime viability (see Ashton 1991, 124–204), although he embraces a final editor along the lines of Brown, as do I. See appendix 1 below.

argued for the chronological priority of John,<sup>45</sup> it is fair to say that most Johannine scholars go with the later date. Because of John's chronological "posteriority," the case is made that earlier sources, such as Mark and hypothetical Q, provide a closer measure of what the historical Jesus may have been like.

**Strengths.** Indeed, the earlier the traditional material, the greater the confidence that may be placed in its historicity. Further, given the high degree of plausibility that Mark was the first Gospel to be finalized, and given the likelihood that an early sayings tradition was drawn upon by Matthew and Luke (Q, or whatever it may have been), a portrait of the historical Jesus based upon Mark and Q should be accorded primacy over the more spiritualized and hellenized John. The fact that Luke and Matthew were also probably finalized before John likewise gives the Synoptic presentations of Jesus precedence over the Johannine. The Johannine Prologue betrays a cultic appraisal of Jesus rooted in the faith and worship of community experience. A Logos Christology, for instance, combined with a presentation of Jesus who has sole control over what happens to him, clearly betrays a more distanced and confessional reflection, which challenges assertions of John's historicity. Likewise, the postresurrection faith of Johannine Christians shows signs of superimposing the Christ of faith over the Jesus of history more than in any of the other canonical Gospels.<sup>46</sup> John's apparent addressing of docetizing tendencies within its audience also raises questions about Gnosticism and John—certainly reflecting later developments in Christianity. For these and other reasons, John's lateness accords it a secondary place among the Gospels with reference to historicity.

**Weaknesses.** John's relative lateness among the canonical Gospels, however, does not mean that John is late and only late. Indeed, John also appears to contain a great deal of primitive tradition and material. (1) John operates in ways parallel to Mark in rendering Jewish terms in Greek, including such Aramaic words as *rabbi/rabbouni* (John 1:38; 20:16), *Messias* (1:41; 4:25), *Bēthzatha* (5:2), *Siloam* (9:7), *Gabbatha* (19:13), and *Golgotha* (19:17). These terms appear to have served

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45. Three leading studies arguing John's primitivity include John A.T. Robinson 1985; Klaus Berger 1997; and Peter Hofrichter 1997. Their primary weakness is common: primitivity of tradition need not imply earliness of finalization. Despite the earliness of much of John's material (see Erwin R. Goodenough 1945), it still seems to have later and more developed material in it as well.

46. While Maurice Casey (1991; 1996) argues for the "profoundly untrue" character of John, he never clearly defines the meaning of "true." He then commits two simplistic and disjunctive errors. First, he forces a dichotomy between seemingly all of John and the Synoptics, requiring a choice to be made between them. Second, he insists upon a division between theology and historicity, denying the latter by affirming the former. Even his correct detection of theological content, however, is hindered by inadequate inferences of its meaning, equating the presentation of the *Ioudaioi* in John with anti-Semitism, moving from thence to racism and thus to pervasive historical error.

at the latest within the Palestinian period of John's tradition, and their "translation" seems to bridge primitive tradition with later Hellenistic audiences.

(2) John explains Jewish customs to a Gentile audience. Such passages as John 2:6, 13; 4:9; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; 19:31, 40, 42 connect Palestinian Jewish worship practices and social customs with later non-Jewish audiences. If John is late and only late, the presence of this material is hard to explain.

(3) John includes some of the most explicit archaeological and topographical references among all the Gospels. Particular places locating events are mentioned explicitly, including the places where John baptized (Bethabara beyond the Jordan, 1:28;<sup>47</sup> Aenon near Salim, 3:23; beyond the Jordan, 3:26; 10:40) and Jesus performed his ministries (other than Jerusalem, Galilee, 1:43; 4:3; 6:1; 7:1, 9; Cana of Galilee, 2:1–11; 4:46–54; Capernaum, 2:12; 4:46; 6:17, 24, 59; Judea, 4:3, 47, 54; 7:1, 3; 11:7; Samaria, 4:4, 5, 7, 9; the Sea of Tiberias, 6:1, 23; 21:1; Bethany, 11:1, 18; and a village near Ephraim to which Jesus withdrew, 11:54).

(4) Places where people were from include the following: Philip, Andrew, and Peter were from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:44; 12:20–21); Jesus, from Nazareth, saw Nathanael, an authentic Israelite, under a fig tree (1:45–48); Judas son of Simon was from Kerioth in Judea (distinctively the only disciple of Jesus from the south; cf. Jer 48:24; Amos 2:2; John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2; another Judas was not, John 14:22); Jerusalem leaders declare, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?" (the Christ was to come from Bethlehem, David's village, John 7:41–52); Bethany was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (11:1, 18–20; 12:1); the one the soldiers sought was "Jesus of Nazareth" (18:7); Mary of Magdala and other women were present at the cross, and Mary was present after the resurrection (19:25–26; 20:1; 18); Joseph of Arimathea requested the body of Jesus (19:38); and Nathanael was from Cana of Galilee (21:2).

(5) Explicit distances reported include the disciples setting off across the lake for Capernaum and rowing 25 or 30 *stadia* (furlongs, three or four miles; John 6:17–19); Jesus' return with his disciples to Bethany, 15 *stadia* from Jerusalem (11:18); and the boat was about 200 *πηχών* (cubits, a hundred yards) from the shore, where Jesus had built a fire (21:8–9). Likewise, spatial uses of *ἀναβαίνω* ("ascend, go up") are used topographically in John (with reference to Jerusalem, 2:13; 5:1; 7:8, 10; 11:55; 12:20; to the temple, 7:14; out of the water, 21:11); as are uses of *καταβαίνω* ("descend, go down" to Capernaum, 2:12; 4:47, 49; into the

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47. It is more likely to infer that "Bethany" was added later than to infer that *Bethabara* or *Betharaba* replaced the more common place name. The speculation that, because Bethany was not across the Jordan and that the Evangelist has thus made an inexcusable geographical mistake, is itself based upon a flawed assumption (see Parker 1955). Leading archaeological investigations in Jordan are currently excavating a site east of the Jordan River (not far from Jericho), which have found both the remains of a village and a former tributary to the Jordan that had once formed pools of water—confirming the Johannine account.

water, 5:7; into the boat, 6:16). Spatial and topographic references appear to be used with intentionality in John.

(6) The narrator appears to know particular topographical details, including John baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was *plenty of water* there (John 3:23). Jesus departed across the Sea of Galilee, that is, of Tiberias (6:1; 21:1). Jesus visited Jacob's well in Sychar of Samaria, having to go through Samaria between Jerusalem and Galilee (4:5); neither the mountain of Samaria (Gerizim) nor Jerusalem is the credited place of worship (4:19–24); Jesus fled again to the mountain alone (6:15) and was later found on the other side of the lake (6:25); the Bread of Life discourse was delivered at the Synagogue of Capernaum (6:59); Lazarus's tomb was a cave with stone lying in front of it (11:38); Jesus withdrew to the wilderness area near the village of Ephraim and remained there with his disciples (11:54); the crowd who had come for the (Passover) feast met Jesus on his way to Jerusalem (12:12).

(7) Particular Jerusalem details are mentioned: Jesus went up to the temple courts for the Passover (John 2:13); he went up to Jerusalem for a Jewish feast to a pool named Βηθζαθα near the Sheep Gate, which is surrounded by five porticoes, or covered colonnades (5:1–2); halfway through the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus went up to the temple courts to teach (7:14), speaking in the treasury area of the temple (8:20) and leaving the temple area (8:59); the blind man was told to wash in the Pool of Siloam (9:7); at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, Jesus walked in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade (10:22–23); Jesus and his disciples crossed the Brook of Kidron and entered the garden there (18:1); the other disciple (but not Peter) was allowed to enter the courtyard of the high priest because he was known to the high priest (18:15); Jesus declared he had spoken openly in the synagogues (6:59) and the temple (7:14, 28), where all the Judeans gathered (18:20); Jesus was led from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, where Pilate met with them outside (18:28–29); having gone inside and outside several times, Pilate came out and sat on a juridical seat, in Aramaic called *Gabbatha* (the ridge of the house), on a place called the "Stone Pavement" (Greek Λιθόστρωτον, 19:13); Jesus carried his cross to the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew was called *Golgotha* (19:17); the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city (19:20); near the place where Jesus was crucified was a garden and a new tomb in which no one had been buried (19:41); Mary the Magdalene saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb and later announced the resurrection to the disciples (20:1, 18).

(8) While time is developed *kairotically* in John (momentous time versus chronological time; the "hour" of Jesus has or has not come, 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:21, 25, 32; 17:1; the "hour" will have come for the disciples, 11:9; 16:2, 4; things change "from that time on" for Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple, 19:27), ὥρα is also used in explicit, chronological terms. Jesus called his disciples at the tenth hour, which is the end of the day and finding somewhere to stay for the night is an issue (1:39). Jesus approached

the woman at the well at the sixth hour, obviating a noon-time event (4:6). The seventh hour was the time of Jesus' healing word from afar, and it was indeed the same time as the recovery of the royal official's son (4:52–53). The sixth hour also comes in with reference to the timing of the crucifixion, locating the event in the middle of the day (19:14). Likewise, "day" is used seasonally (8:56; 9:4; 11:9, 53; 12:7; 19:31) and eschatologically (the last day, 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48) in John, but it also is used with apparent chronological intention. In general terms, a few days' passing is mentioned (2:12), and some events follow others on the same day (5:9; 20:19), but the explicit numeration of days is also employed: a marriage was held on the third day (2:1); after three days Jesus (this temple) will be raised up (2:19–20); Jesus stayed in Samaria two days (4:40, 43) and waited two days before traveling to Bethany (11:6); Lazarus had been dead four days (11:17); the anointing of Jesus was six days before the Passover (12:1); and after eight days Jesus again appeared to his disciples (20:26). The particular year of Caiaphas's service as high priest is mentioned (11:49, 51; 18:13), duration of time is measured in years (the forty-six years taken to rebuild the temple, 2:20; the paralytic had been ill for thirty-eight years, 5:5; Jesus is not yet fifty years of age, 8:57), and winter is mentioned as the time of year for the Feast of Dedication (10:22). Also, the early part of the day is mentioned (18:28; 20:1; 21:4), as is the evening (6:16; 20:19).

(9) Graphic and sensory-types of detail also appear in the Johannine narration. Indeed, scholars point out the plausibly symbolic function of much of this material, but the fact that it is presented as empirically inferred detail is striking nonetheless. Sensorily derived material is a fact in John: John confesses openly that he is not the Christ (John 1:20) and reports what he has seen (1:32–34); Nathanael was under the fig tree (1:48); six stone purification jars are described as holding two or three μετρητοῦ (2:6); Jesus made a whip out of chords (2:15); Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night" (3:2); the well on the plot of ground Jacob had given to his sons appears familiar (4:5–6); 200 δηνάριον would not buy enough food for the multitude (6:7); "much grass" describes the feeding setting with the men numbering five thousand (6:10); the loaves were barley (6:9–13), and the sort of fish served and eaten was ὀψάριον (a prepared fish, 6:9, 11; 21:9, 10, 13); people picked up stones to kill Jesus (8:59); spittle and mud were applied to the blind man's eyes (9:6–15); a bad odor accompanied Lazarus (11:39); Lazarus was wrapped in strips of linen around his hands and feet and a cloth over his face (11:44); the house was filled with the fragrance of the pure nard ointment (12:3); the perfume itself was worth 300 δηνάριον (12:5); the crowd waved palm branches (12:13); Jesus changed into the clothes of a servant (13:4–5); Judas departed at night (13:30); lanterns and torches were in the garden (18:3); the *right* ear of the servant (whose name is Malchus) was severed by a disciple (Peter, 18:10); it was cold outside the courtyard of the high priest, and servants and attendants stood around a fire (18:18); the cock crowed after Peter's third denial (18:27); the soldiers placed a crown of thorns on Jesus' head and a purple

robe around him (19:2, 5); Pilate's inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (19:20); four divisions of Jesus' clothes were made and divided up among the soldiers (19:23); Jesus' tunic was seamless, woven from top to bottom, which is why lots had to be cast for it (19:23–24); a sponge on a hyssop stick was dipped in a jar of vinegar and offered to Jesus, and he partook of it (19:29–30); water and blood came out from Jesus' side (attested by "the eyewitness," 19:34–35); the type and weight of the spices are noted (about 100 λίτρας of a mixture of myrrhs and aloes, 19:39); it was still dark when Mary came to the tomb on the first day of the week and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb (20:1); when the other disciple and Peter arrived and looked into the tomb, they saw linen strips lying there with the head cloth folded and placed separately from the rest (20:5–7); the disciples had gathered behind closed doors (20:19, 26); Thomas saw and touched Jesus' flesh wounds (20:25–27); nets are thrown from the right side of the boat (21:6); Peter put on his coat (because he was naked) before jumping in the water (21:7); the charcoal fire had fish and bread on it (21:9); and the nets did not break despite holding 153 fish (21:11).

(10) John mentions the names of persons in ways that imply familiarity. Andrew (John 1:40, 44; 6:8; 12:22) is identified as Peter's brother; Thomas (11:16; 14:5; 20:24, 26, 27, 28, 29; 21:2) is referred to by the nickname *Didymos* (11:16; 20:24; 21:2); the sons of Zebedee are mentioned only once (21:2), *Cephas* is the Aramaic name given to Simon Peter (1:42), and Peter (1:40, 44; 6:8, 68; 13:6, 9, 24, 36, 37; 18:10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27; 20:2, 3, 4, 6; 21:2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21) is described as the son of Jonas (1:42; 21:15, 16, 17); Judas is described in consistently treacherous terms (6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29; 18:2, 3, 5), although another Judas (not Iscariot, 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26; 14:22) is also mentioned (14:22); Nathanael is referred to as an Israelite in whom there is nothing false (1:45, 46, 47, 48, 49; 21:2); Philip is mentioned more prominently in John than in all the other Gospels combined (1:43, 44, 45, 46, 48; 6:5, 7; 12:21, 22; 14:8, 9); two unnamed disciples are mentioned (1:35, 37; 21:2), one or more unnamed (the other, another) disciples are mentioned (18:15, 16; 20:3, 4, 8); and the enigmatic Beloved Disciple is given a special place of honor in the Johannine narrative (13:23; 19:26, 27; 20:2; 21:24). By these references relationships are heightened, and personal knowledge is conveyed in ways that sometimes further the narrative and sometimes do not.

In addition to Jesus' disciples who accompanied him in his ministry, Annas (John 18:13, 24) is mentioned as the father-in-law to Caiaphas the high priest (11:49; 18:13, 14, 24, 28); Joseph of Arimathea (19:38) is presented as the generous benefactor of the tomb; Barabbas is described as a robber (18:40); Joseph is referred to as the acknowledged father of Jesus (1:45; 6:42); Jesus' mother is mentioned, but not by name (2:3; 19:25); Lazarus is identified as a close friend whom Jesus loved (11:1, 2, 5, 11, 14, 43; 12:1, 2, 9, 10, 17), as are his sisters Mary (11:1, 2, 19, 20, 28, 31, 32, 45; 12:3) and Martha (11:1, 2, 19, 20, 21, 24, 30, 39; 12:2); Mary of Magdala encounters the risen Lord (19:25; 20:1, 18) and

brings her witness to the others; Malchus is given as the name of the servant whose ear was severed (18:10); Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night (3:1, 4, 9; 7:50; 19:39); the woman of Samaria becomes an effective evangelist to her people (4:7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, 28, 39, 42); and Pilate is described dramatically as the impotent potentate at the trial scene (18:29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38; 19:1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 19, 21, 22, 31, 38). In these ways other actants are brought into the narrative, adding color and tension to its fabric. Some of this material is even accorded red or pink status by the Jesus Seminar in acknowledgement of its likely historicity.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously, it is possible that all these details were simply fabricated in mimetic form as art imitates reality, and some scholars argue such.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, many of the details may be included for rhetorical reasons or as a means of heightening the lucidity of a passage, as other contemporary literature may have done. It must be acknowledged, however, that the closest parallels to John—the Synoptic Gospels—show the *reverse* of the so-called mimetic proliferation of detail. Mark and John have far more nonsymbolic illustrative detail than Matthew and Luke, and where Matthew and Luke take over a Markan passage, they tend to eliminate names and places and to leave out details in summary form. If John operated similar to its close literary parallels, the Synoptics, the abundance of detail is more likely attributable to the oral stages of the tradition, as was probably the case for Mark. In fact, the best explanation of the detail common only to John and Mark is that buzz words and images were shared between the oral stages of the two traditions, perhaps in *interfluent* ways. Because influence in one direction to the exclusion of the other is impossible to establish between two autonomous traditions, interfluence is the best way to describe these relationships. The relative absence of this sort of detail from Luke and Matthew suggests what is left out when engaging a written form of Mark's tradition: the superfluous detail. Luke's access to the Johannine material also appears to have collected several Johannine details during its oral renderings, notably the *right ear* being

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48. The detail about Annas being the father-in-law of that year's high priest, Caiaphas (John 18:13), is one of the only Johannine passages listed in red, and the taking of Jesus from the place of Caiaphas to the governor's residence (18:28) is listed in pink (having plausible likelihood—a three on a scale of one to four) in the voting of the Jesus Seminar (Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998, 429, 431).

49. Erich Auerbach (1953) argues that mimetic imitation is used broadly in making a narrative more readable and believable. Richard L. Sturch (1980) applies such an inference to John, seeking to overturn the works of Westcott and Dodd in their connecting of apparent eyewitness detail with the eyewitness claims of the redactor by identifying their mimetic associations. While some details "resist elimination," he claims to show that alternative explanations mean that demonstrating the "Evangelist was an eyewitness of nearly all that he reported . . . cannot in fact be achieved" (324). Again, the fallacy presents itself operationally: because *all* of John is not historical, *none* of John is historical. This overstates the case in the observe direction.



cut off and *Satan entering Judas*. Of course, none of the above details may have originated in events, but these and other inclusions of apparently primitive material give one pause before asserting that John was late and only late. The obvious fallacy here is the assumption that John's finalized lateness discounts all of John's apparent earliness. Something between these two poles is far more plausible critically.

#### 2.4. CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING HISTORICITY

The task of determining historicity in investigating the historical Jesus has led to several criteria for making these judgments. The criterion of dissimilarity distinguishes later predictable portrayals from more primitive ones. The criterion of multiple attestation singles out units that appear more than once to describe an event or saying in the ministry of Jesus. The criterion of coherence distinguishes a presentation that seems to cohere with what Jesus is thought to have been like over and against other portrayals. The criterion of naturalism distinguishes the mundane from the more fantastic renderings, crediting the former with greater plausibility. Other criteria are used, but these four continue to be applied across Gospel studies, and their use has laid the foundation for the majority of modernist Jesus studies.<sup>50</sup>

**Strengths.** Indeed, later developments reflect the emerging history of Jesus traditions rather than offer a window into the historical Jesus. Examples from Synoptic studies include the identification of ecclesial interests emerging in the Matthean tradition over and against less developed Mark and Luke's presentation of Jesus as a just man. Indeed, John's adaptation of Jesus to fit the tastes of Hellenistic audiences and the needs of late-first-century believers probably reflects more closely the emergent history of the Johannine situation than the originative history of the material, so this criterion is of some benefit in combining Jesus and Johannine studies. The second criterion also works well in that it produces a set of test cases for conducting comparative Gospel analysis. The passages most conducive to inter-Gospel analysis include the ministry of John the Baptist, the temple cleansing, events surrounding John 6 (the feeding, sea crossing, the discussion of the feeding, and the confession of Peter), the anointing of Jesus, the passion narratives, and the appearance narratives. This being the case, however, over half of John is not only distinctive but unique among the Gospels, which

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50. In addition to these criteria, embarrassment is included by John P. Meier (1991, 167–95), as are secondary criteria, including traces of Aramaic, Palestinian environment, vividness of narration, tendencies of the developing Synoptic tradition, and historical presumption. Stanley E. Porter (2000) highlights Gerd Theissen's "plausibility" as a criterion and puts forward Aramaic and Greek as languages of Jesus, Greek language in its context, Greek textual variance, and discourse features.



raises questions as to its proximity to the historical Jesus. The third criterion is one of the most significant in these matters because the impression of a Jesus who speaks in short, pithy sayings, who imparts wisdom as a sage, who prefers secrecy to publicity, and who calls for the way of the cross is very different from the exalted and self-confessing messiah we find in John. The fourth criterion pushes the miraculous renderings of Jesus in the Gospels to sources other than historical ones, which is to be expected in the modern era. Cause-and-effect relationships provide better windows into historicity, and a divine Jesus striding over the earth in John appears to be rooted more in mythology than in history. Therefore, these criteria are valuable in distinguishing the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history, and their results are especially telling for assessing the relation of John's narration to the Jesus of history, producing a largely negative set of results.

**Weaknesses.** Problems with each of these methods abound, and they especially are problematic when taken together. The criterion of *dissimilarity*, if pushed hard, for instance, assumes that Jesus did *nothing* that his followers assimilated into their values and practices. It also infers that Jesus did nothing conventional or that, if he did, it cannot count as part of the data base distinguishing him from other prophets and rabbis in his day. While this method may indeed clarify what aspects of historicity are least likely to have been invented by later Christians, making a portrait out of the "odd" memories is sure to produce a distorted presentation. So, even if the criterion of dissimilarity does produce clarity on some matters of historical plausibility, its very emphasis upon distinctiveness produces a skewed image.<sup>51</sup>

The second criterion, *multiple attestation*, also is helpful for investigating the Jesus of history, especially when the presentations are not identical. Where they are identical, source dependence and redaction may be inferred, which diminishes the likelihood of more than one attestation being present. It may reflect a derivative relationship between Gospel traditions. The Gospel of John, despite its distinctiveness, overlaps with other Gospels in significant ways, and it may therefore be assumed that Jesus probably did connect with the Baptist, create a temple disturbance, preside at some sort of feeding and sea rescue, receive an anointing, undergo the passion events, and was experienced in some way by his followers after his death. Indeed, these connections between John and the Synoptics provide the best test cases for analysis and thus have been the classic passages receiving analytical attention. What cannot be said, however, is that a singular or minority report is necessarily less credible. It may also be the case that particular details and distinctive presentations reflect an authentic historical memory, so this criterion can be used only to affirm, not to discount, a report's historicity. For instance, if John was familiar with Mark, perhaps with the Evangelist having

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51. Again, Borg's point is worth keeping in mind (2002); holding open the possibility that "at least" this much is historically true is very different from asserting that "only" this much is true.

heard a public reading of the material, or at least parts of it, distinctive material in John may have been included intentionally because such was not present in Mark. Again, this criterion may be used to affirm, but it cannot be used to deny, a passage's historicity.

The third criterion, *coherence*, is important for distinguishing the sort of Jesus we believe ministered in Palestine from more fanciful renderings in early Christianity. A lucid example of a noncohering Jesus is the presentation of boy-Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, who makes pigeons out of clay that fly away after he claps his hands, who kills his friends with a curse when they anger him (only to bring them back to life again to make a happy ending), and who is instructed by Zacchaeus (a perfect child-size teacher) despite having written the languages himself. Despite some parallels with Luke's childhood narratives, this book falls far short of anything historical, largely because its rendering of Jesus does not cohere with more solid and reliable impressions. The vulnerability of this criterion, however, lies with its circularity. The impression of Jesus to which other presentations do or do not conform is itself based upon those same sources when applied to canonical Gospel analysis. This being the case, it is no wonder that John loses when the picture of the "historical" Jesus is determined on the basis of information in the Synoptics—excluding John—and then this grid is plied over the Fourth Gospel to determine its authenticity. What if the reverse were performed? What if a picture of the historical Jesus were determined upon the basis of John—the one purportedly eyewitness account—and material in the Synoptics were sifted through a Johannine grid and voted upon by scholars applying *their* criteria for determining historicity? The results would be entirely different from those starting with the Synoptics only. Perhaps the problem lies with excluding *any* primitive tradition when forming one's impression of a coherence standard—including John. When tradition-critical inclusion/exclusion methodologies build upon the Synoptics and second-century gnostic texts to the exclusion of John and then are used to find John wanting, this circular operation cannot but be regarded as dubious and critically flawed.

Nonetheless, in addition to the many aphoristic Jesus sayings in John mentioned above, many of the other "coherent impressions of Jesus" rooted in Mark can also be found in John, although in slightly different forms. The "messianic secret" in Mark, however, should not be regarded as Jesus' diminishing of his messianic mission;<sup>52</sup> it is more precisely a reference to Jesus eschewing popularistic and sensationalistic appraisals of his ministry. Likewise, John presents Jesus as rejecting these features in his flight from the crowd's design to rush him off for a messianic coronation (John 6:14–15), his rebuke of those requesting mes-

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52. This was Albert Schweitzer's review of Wrede's work: "Because Wrede does not deal with the teaching of Jesus, he has no occasion to take account of the secret of the kingdom of God" (Schweitzer 2001, 312).

sianic signs (2:18–19; 4:48; 6:26, 28–30; 20:29), and his refusal to disclose himself openly because of a reluctance to embellish human testimony (2:23–25). In these ways the Johannine Jesus *also* eschews popularistic and sensationalistic notoriety parallel to the messianic secret of Mark. Likewise, in his declaration that Jesus' "hour" was not yet come (2:4) but later in declaring the actualization of the ὥρα of Jesus (12:23; 13:1; 17:1), the Johannine narrator works in a way parallel to the culmination of the messianic secret in Mark: tell no one until *after* the resurrection (Mark 9:9), when the meaning of his mission would be apparent. Therefore, the messianic secret has interesting parallels in Mark and John, and the mistake is to delimit a Markan trait to a narrow category. A second Markan motif is found pervasively in John: a theology of the cross.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the Johannine Jesus also invites his followers to join him in his suffering and death, and in Jesus' Johannine aphorisms (John 12:24–26), in his final discourses (15:15–16:33), and in his culminating section in the Bread of Life discourse (6:51–70) Jesus calls his followers to embrace the way of the cross. To ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus is to partner with him martyrologically, as the bread he offers is his flesh, given for the life of the world on the cross.<sup>54</sup> The point here is that, if the distinctively Johannine rendering is accounted for, John is not as far away from the coherent view of Jesus as typified in Mark, and John may even contribute in its distinctive sort of way to the multiple attestation of Jesus' teachings about the messianic secret and the way of the cross. It cannot be said that these emphases are totally absent from John.

The fourth criterion, *naturalism*, is of course one of the primary bases for questioning John's historicity to begin with. John's supernatural presentation of Jesus bears with it considerable problems for historicity. The Johannine Prologue presents Jesus in preexistent terms, but it obviously also does not qualify as part of the Johannine narrative. Jesus is presented as "knowing" people, including what is in their hearts (John 1:48; 2:24–25; 4:3, 16–19; 5:6, 42; 6:15, 64) and is able to escape attempts to arrest and kill him (7:30; 8:59; 10:39). He also declares things in advance in order that their fulfillment might attest to his being sent from God (13:18–19; 16:2–4; 18:8–9, 31–32), and his disciples experience his predictions' coming true (2:19–22; 3:14; 4:50–3; 6:51, 64–65; 7:33–34, 38–39; 8:21, 28; 10:11, 15–8; 11:4, 23; 12:24, 32–33; 13:33, 38; 14:2–3, 18–20, 23; 15:13; 16:16, 20, 28, 32; 18:9, 32), especially regarding his glorification. Jesus' signs, of course,

53. See James T. Forestell 1974 for a fuller development of this theme.

54. See an intensive treatment of John 6 in Anderson 1996, 48–250. Parallel to the "sacramental" imagery of Jesus' reference to the drinking of his cup and sharing in his baptism in Mark 10:35–45, John 6:51–38 likewise calls the hearer/reader to the martyrological willingness to suffer and die with Jesus if demanded by life to do so, and this is *why* the disciples were scandalized and why some abandoned him. They did not misunderstand Jesus; they understood full well his hard saying as a reference to the cost of discipleship and the way of the cross (1996, 110–36, 207–20).

are extremely problematic for a naturalistic modernist, although recent historical-Jesus questers are willing to allow at least some healing and exorcist work to have been done by Jesus, in keeping with contemporary figures. Certainly the signs of Jesus were used apologetically to convince members of the Johannine audience that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah, and the embellishment of such narratives is likely. The problem with ascribing all of John to the canons of ahistoricity because of its wondrous elements is that John also has a great deal of incarnational and fleshly Jesus material in it.<sup>55</sup> Out of his side flow physical blood and water (19:34); Thomas is allowed to touch with his finger the flesh wounds of Jesus (20:27); and his disciples must ingest his flesh-and-bloodness (6:51–58), if they hope to participate in the life he avails. Jesus also weeps (11:35); his heart is deeply troubled (11:33; 12:27; 13:21); he groans (11:33, 38); he thirsts on the cross (19:28); and he loves his own (11:3, 5, 36; 13:1, 23, 34; 14:21; 15:9, 10, 12; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) with *pathos*, enough to be called the “pathetic” Jesus.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, John’s elevated presentation of Jesus has been one of the most provocative aspects of Christian material, leading the church into centuries of debate over metaphysical aspects of Christology, but every bit as present is John’s presentation of the incarnational Jesus.<sup>57</sup> Just as the church fathers and mothers had to keep these polar aspects of the Johannine dialectic in tension, so must modern critical scholars, if they are to remain honest to John. Holding John’s elevated material at bay is understandable for the modern critic, but if the elevated christological elements in John are considered apart from the humiliated elements and the entire historicity of the Fourth Gospel is rejected on the basis of such a distortion, such moves commit the fallacy of a sweeping generalization and are less than worthy as “critical” scholarship. It could also be that the apparently miraculous in John does not always require a supernatural categorization, but to neglect the entirety of John’s incarnational thrust is to push John beyond itself. Such is flawed as an exegetical and as a historiographic move.

Part of the problem in applying the above methods to determining degrees of historicity within John is that the standards over and against which John is measured do not include Johannine content to begin with in setting the template. John is especially excluded from setting dissimilarity and coherence standards, so it is little wonder that they produce a dearth of historical material when these grids are plied back over the Johannine text. Where the great promise of critical scholarship has been its objective neutrality, the historical treatment of John

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55. See Udo Schnelle 1992 and Marianne Meye Thompson 1988.

56. For further detail, see Anderson 2000a.

57. John’s christological tensions are the most interesting feature of Johannine theology, and they possess basically four epistemological origins: the agency Christology rooted in Deut 18; the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist; the evolving needs of the Johannine situation; and the Evangelist’s use of rhetorical devices as a means of engaging the reader in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. See Anderson 1996, 252–65; 1997.

comes across as less than that. When John's material is deemed different from the Synoptics, it is excluded; where it is similar, it is relegated to a derivative relationship to a non-Johannine source (either Mark or a hypothetical source that looked like Mark); elevated christological themes are credited to mythological origins, and mundane references are attributed to mimetic imitations of reality. Therefore, not only the results of the scholarly "consensus" regarding John's irrelevance to the Jesus quest deserve fresh critical analysis, but so do the procedures by which these "results" have been established.

If specific criteria for performing analyses of John's historicity were to be devised, in addition to the above, they might include the following. (1) Examine passages most similar between John and the Synoptics in order to get a full sense of particular similarities and differences. These passages would include the treatment of John the Baptist, the temple cleansing, events surrounding John 6 (feeding, sea crossing, discussion of the feeding, and Peter's confession), the anointing of Jesus, the passion narratives, and the appearance narratives, among others. (2) Consider the material omitted and used by Matthew and Luke (in their redactions of Mark) and see if that sort of analysis suggests anything about John. Upon analysis, two primary kinds of material in Mark tend to be omitted: non-symbolic illustrative detail, and theological asides. As the presence of these sorts of material is more prolific in Mark and John, this may lend insight into the oral rather than written character of the Markan and Johannine traditions. (3) Make allowance for the Johannine paraphrasing of earlier tradition and integrate such material with potential parallels emerging from Synoptic studies. Conceptual parallels should be considered and explored, in addition to extended identical verbal ones. (4) Allow knowledge of John's development to influence one's understanding of Synoptic developments. Perhaps Mark's compilation was not ordered entirely by chronological information, since of it appears to have involved clumping all the Jerusalem events and most of the judgment sayings at the end. Perhaps Luke and Q used the oral Johannine tradition as one of their sources. Perhaps the Matthean and Johannine traditions were in dialogue with each other about governance and how Christ would lead the church. The benefits of intertextual Gospel analysis extend in more than one direction. (5) Reconsider the pneumatic teaching of the Johannine Jesus in the light of charismatic appraisals of the historical Jesus. Despite distinctive presentations, not all early Christian spirituality was gnostic. More congruities may exist than we might have supposed, especially between the charismatic Jesus and the pneumatic traditions about his teachings and ministry. These are a few of the means for exploring historicity we might construct if we were doing historical Jesus studies *with John in the mix*.

## 2.5. THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS BACKGROUND OF JOHN

If John's narration is not rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus, one must put forward an alternative explanation as to where the material came from; the myth-

ological religious background of the Evangelist is the best option available. Given the miracle-working stories of the likes of Apollonius of Tyana in the region several decades after Jesus' ministry and the reports of Simon Magnus in Acts, it is easy to conceive of the Johannine narration's embellishment along these aretological lines. Likewise, many signs and wonders from the Hebrew Scriptures have echoes in John, and just as Homer described great narratives of sea rescues and wondrous adventures, so does the Fourth Evangelist.<sup>58</sup> Bultmann's view, of course, was that a *theios anēr* (a miracle-working god-man) mythic construct prevalent in the contemporary social milieu affected the telling of the Jesus story, that the Evangelist found himself furthering such mythic constructs, and that he also found himself needing to deconstruct such aretologies existentially. Likewise, revelation discourses found in contemporary Jewish and gnostic literature would have impacted the ways the teachings of the Johannine Jesus were crafted and rendered. If the origin of John's material was mythological, these reported events need not have happened in history for them to be narrated meaningfully in John's first-century Jewish and Hellenistic setting.

**Strengths.** Several attractive features about this view include the fact that stories of miracle-workers and divine men abounded in the first-century Mediterranean world.<sup>59</sup> The wisdom myth of early Judaism is presented as the preexistent and creative agency of God;<sup>60</sup> Philostratus described how Apollonius of Tyana performed many miracles and even explained how Apollo of Delphi could turn water into wine if he wanted to;<sup>61</sup> when the son of Rabban Gamaliel was ill, Hanina ben Dosa prayed for him from afar, and he was made well that very hour;<sup>62</sup> the well in Asclepius's temple had healing powers when the waters were stirred;<sup>63</sup> it was believed that at the consummation of time the treasures of heaven would open and manna would descend from heaven;<sup>64</sup> the histories of Suetonius and Tacitus report the emperor Vespasian applying spittle to a blind

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58. See above the descriptions of the Moses and Elijah typologies embodied by the Johannine Jesus.

59. The *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995) presents 132 Hellenistic parallels to the material in the Gospel of John. Most of these are later, but they nonetheless suggest the sorts of Jewish and Hellenistic mythic views that would have been embraced by the Fourth Evangelist and his audiences.

60. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 238. See John 1:1–5, Prov 3:19; 8:22–30; and Bultmann's reconstruction of this myth (1971, 22–23).

61. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 249. See John 2:1–11 and Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.10.

62. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 266. See John 4:46–54 and b. Berakot 34b.

63. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 266. See John 5:1–15 and Aelius Aristides, "Regarding the Well in the Temple of Asclepius," *Speech* 39.14–15.

64. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 271. See John 6:1–31 and 2 Bar 28:2.

man's eyes and the resultant recovery;<sup>65</sup> and Homer describes a thundering response from heaven, as the prayer of Odysseus was apparently well received by Zeus.<sup>66</sup> In these and other ways the investigation of John's history of religions background is essential for understanding the origin and formation of the Johannine narrative.

**Weaknesses.** While Jewish and Hellenistic hero stories and mythic constructs clearly would have impacted Gospel narrations of Jesus' ministry, this is not the same as claiming that they constituted the sole origin of the Johannine narrative. This is the first and cardinal weakness of assuming that the presentation of Jesus in the mould of contemporary mythic constructs thoroughly displaced the historical origin of the entire Johannine narrative. A narrative's developmental history cannot disprove its originative history. A second weakness is the fact that evidence for non-Johannine sources has not been convincing enough to merit credence in the sort of source-critical inferences made by Bultmann and others as to where the Johannine material may have originated.<sup>67</sup> That being the case, aretological and gnostic material coming into the Johannine tradition from afar is diminished in its plausibility. A third weakness with imputing Hellenistic mythic constructs onto the Johannine tradition is that John's Jewish background is already quite clear. As mentioned above, the Johannine Jesus clearly is presented as fulfilling the Jewish typologies of Moses and Elijah and is explicitly credited with fulfilling many messianic associations within the Jewish Scriptures. Even the Logos Christology of the Prologue bears considerable similarities with Gen 1, and if the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered twenty years earlier, Bultmann would not have been able to write the commentary that he did. First-century dualism was Jewish as well as Hellenistic, and John's Jesus is portrayed clearly as a Jewish Messiah repackaged for later Jewish and Hellenistic audiences.<sup>68</sup> A fourth weakness is that, despite the many similarities to contemporary mythologies, John's narration is time and again closer to the Synoptic renderings of Jesus, although it cannot be said that John is close enough to have depended upon them. This being the case, the bi-optic theory of John and Mark—representing two individuated and yet somewhat interfluent Gospel traditions—offers the best explanation of their primary historical origins.<sup>69</sup> History of religions information illuminates the

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65. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 285–84. See John 9:6, Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 7; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.89.

66. Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995, 292. See John 12:29 and Homer, *Odyssey* 20.97–104.

67. Robert Kysar's change of mind (1999b, 40) regarding evidence for sources underlying John represents a significant shift, I believe.

68. Maurice Casey 1991. See, however, the impressive analysis of the history of religions background of the Johannine Prologue by Karl-Josef Kuschel 1992, 363–95.

69. Below is a charting of plausible Synoptic-Johannine relationships (also in Anderson 2006b, 126), in which John's dialogical autonomy is sketched. A two-edition theory of John's composition sees the first edition completed before 85 C.E., with a final edition completed



background and worldviews of John and its audiences, but it cannot suffice as the sole, or even the primary, historical origin of the Johannine narrative.

## 2.6. EMERGING PORTRAITS OF JESUS

One contribution emerging from recent Jesus studies is the sketching of several “portraits” of Jesus, each rooted in first-century historical images of religious and philosophical leaders. Marcus Borg’s digest of images of Jesus in contemporary scholarship has been very helpful for understanding these constructs (1994). Borg lists four major portraits of Jesus representing some of the most creative work of contemporary Jesus scholars. First, envisioning Jesus as a noneschatological prophet allows us to see him against a backdrop of Jewish prophets who were not about apocalyptic futurism, but about justice and social reform in the present. Second, envisioning Jesus as a wisdom-imparting sage fits the Q tradition and his short, pithy sayings about the character of the kingdom of God. Third, envisioning Jesus as an institution-challenging Cynic fits his tendency to challenge the institutions and conventionality of his Jewish and Roman setting, and it coheres with his dining with “sinners” and healing on the Sabbath as provocative actions. Fourth, envisioning Jesus as a holy man reconnects his healings and spiritual ministries with the sorts of things that an indigenous healer and exorcist might do. A fifth portrait, not covered by Borg but substantive nonetheless, involves envisioning Jesus as an apocalyptic messenger.<sup>70</sup> Each of these portraits provides a heuristic lens through which to see more clearly the ministry and message of the Jesus of history.

**Strengths.** Because each of these portraits is rooted in socioreligious models contemporary with the historical Jesus, it does not take much imagination to reconfigure one’s understanding of Jesus within one or more of these moulds. That is why John’s presentation of a Jesus who speaks primarily of his relation to the Father, who speaks about himself and the authenticity of his mission, and who performs miraculous signs while at the same time deemphasizing their importance might seem at odds with any or all of these portraits. That being the case,

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around 100 C.E.; the Epistles may have been produced between the two by the Elder, who served as the final compiler of the Gospel after the death of the Beloved Disciple. Johannine-Markan engagements reflect interfluent contact in the oral stages of their traditions, and the first edition of John appears to have augmented and to some degree corrected Mark. The Lukan and Q traditions appear to have drawn from the Johannine oral tradition, as evidenced by the “bolt out of the Johannine blue” in Q, and alternatively, the fact that Luke departs from Mark no fewer than three dozen times in order to side with John. A set of interfluent dialogues also seems to have developed between the Matthean and the later Johannine traditions, evoking a Johannine corrective to rising institutionalism, as suggested by the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John.

70. See especially Bart D. Ehrman 1999 for an excellent overview of this portrait.



the Jesus of the religious anthropologist becomes more attractive historically than the spiritualized Jesus of the Fourth Gospel for many a Jesus scholar.

**Weaknesses.** However, a closer look at the Johannine text makes such disjunctive judgments hard to understand. Despite John's pervasive nondependence on the Synoptic traditions, the case can be made that each of these portraits does find a home in John's presentation of Jesus, in some ways *more clearly than* his presentation in any one of the Synoptic Gospels. Consider, for instance, the presentation in John of Jesus as a noneschatological prophet. The primary history of religions image embodied by the Johannine Jesus is the prophet-like-Moses typology rooted in Deut 18:15–22 (see Anderson 1999a). Rather than a gnostic redeemer myth, the Father-Son relationship in John is ordered by Jesus' sense of having been sent by the Father, claiming to speak only what he has seen and heard from the Father (Deut 18:15). Therefore, God's words are his words and vice versa (18:18), God will hold people accountable in reference to their response to Jesus as God's agent (18:19), and the way the authentic prophet is distinguishable from the false prophet is that the true prophet's words come true (18:22). The Johannine Jesus fulfills the Mosaic typology in multiple ways,<sup>71</sup> and it is even arguable that John's Mosaic prophet typology was closer to the historical Jesus' self-understanding than the Synoptic king-like-David royal typology. The Johannine Jesus claims to have been sent from the Father, not speaking on his own behalf but representing the Father fully, in keeping with the agency typology of Deut 18:15–22. In these ways he fits the prophetic model entirely—even more clearly than Synoptic presentations.

The Johannine Jesus can also be conceived within the portraiture of a wisdom-imparting sage. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus not only brings divine wisdom; he *is* the Word and Wisdom of God (Prov 8:22–30) to the world and imparts saving knowledge to all who believe. John's Wisdom Christology has not gone unnoticed by scholars, nor has its sapiential thrust. Jesus not only brings light to penetrate the darkness of worldly thought; he *is* the Light of the world (John 1:4, 5, 8, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Those who come to him are drawn by the Father and are taught by God (6:44–50; cf. Isa 54:13; Deut 8:3),<sup>72</sup> and Jesus has amassed great learning without ever receiving formal training (John 7:15). Even Greeks come from afar to drink from Jesus' wisdom (12:20–21). The theme of personified Wisdom is more centrally featured in John than it is in Q, and indeed the case can be made that the “bolt out of the Johannine blue” in Matthew and

71. Jan-Adolf Bühner 1977; T. F. Glasson 1963; and Adele Reinhartz 1989 support this typology being found in John.

72. Raymond E. Brown 2003, 259–65, includes a special section on “Wisdom Motifs.” In this section Brown argues that personified Wisdom associations with Jesus are even stronger in John than in any of the other canonical Gospels. For the wisdom motif in John, see also Michael E. Willett 1992; Sharon H. Ringe 1999; and Ben Witherington III 1995b.

Luke actually reflects the Q tradition's dependence on the primitive Johannine tradition.<sup>73</sup> The point is that the Johannine wisdom motif is used to describe the mission and message of Jesus in ways that are striking and also independent from the Synoptic traditions.

John also presents Jesus readily as an institution-challenging Cynic, in that Jesus cleanses the temple at the beginning of his ministry, heals on the Sabbath, confronts religious authorities in Jerusalem prolifically, and is willing to challenge the Roman governor in the name of God's transcendent truth and reign. The Johannine Jesus challenges all that is of human origin, being the manifestation of the divine initiative; the Revelation of God scandalizes political, religious, and worldly authorities. One can also claim that the juxtaposition of the Beloved Disciple and Peter in John functioned to challenge rising institutionalization within the late first-century church, and it did so rhetorically in the name of Jesus' original intentionality. At least seven parallels in John can be identified with some relation to the keys of the kingdom passage in Matt 16:17–19, yet they are all different. Does this imply that they were corrective parallels, clearing the ground within the Christian movement for the pneumatic work of the *παράκλητος*?<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the presentation of Jesus challenging conventionalities and all that is of human origin in the name of the transcendent God is as clear in John as it is anywhere in the New Testament.

Likewise, Jesus certainly comes across with spiritual power, as a holy man in John. While he does not perform exorcisms, the Johannine Jesus is encountered by people epiphanically. Like Nathanael and the Samaritan woman, actants in the Johannine narrative experience themselves as being known by God in their encounters with Jesus, and even a royal official believes Jesus can do his household some good—from afar. Jesus' signs demonstrate that he came from God, and his teachings are experienced as authoritative by those open to the truth. Upon encountering the presence of the divine in Jesus, those who meet him experience themselves as being known by God. Indeed, in telling the Johannine story the Greek device of *anagorisis* (a recognition marker)<sup>75</sup> is used, but this does not mean that the reports themselves were entirely fictive in their origins. They may have been, but proving so has yet to be established. How would persons have experienced the numinous in the presence of a charismatic figure, such as Jesus—let alone reflected upon it later? Given the Johannine belief that the work of “another” *παράκλητος* is continuous with the ministry of Jesus, it is not too far off the mark to consider that Jesus is remembered as evoking human-divine encounter, much like any holy or spirit-imbued person would have done. In that

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73. Certainly this is more plausible than inferring that a characteristically Johannine theme came from one small unit in Q—the theme is pervasively Johannine (Anderson 2002a, 48–50).

74. See table 20 in Anderson 1996, 240; likewise, see Anderson 1997, 50–57.

75. See the development of this feature in R. Alan Culpepper 1998, 71–83.

sense, Jesus as a holy man cannot be said to be incompatible with the Johannine presentation of Jesus. This portrait also fits John entirely well.

A final portrait also works with John's presentation of Jesus: as an apocalyptic messenger, the Johannine Jesus comes to the world dividing the children of God from those whose spiritual origins and investments are other.<sup>76</sup> All who come to the light receive the newness of life and are given the authority to become the children of God (John 1:12). The time is coming, and now is here, that even the dead will hear the voice of the Son and live (5:25), and those who believe will be raised up at the end of the age (6:39, 40, 44, 54). The Johannine Son of Man indeed comes as an eschatological agent, and the paradoxical exaltation of Jesus on the cross brings about the glory of God. The prince of this world is overthrown by Jesus (12:31), and eschatological judgment is effected by the mission and glorification of the Son of Man, who ascends and descends in ways Danielic (Dan 7:13; John 1:51; 6:62). In these and other ways, despite John's mystical passages and emphases upon loving one another, the apocalyptic motif comes through clearly, and the entire ministry of Jesus is presented eschatologically. What certainly cannot be said is that the portraiture of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet is fundamentally at odds with the Johannine narration. It too is found in John, but in an autonomous and distinctive set of ways.

A consideration of the "portraits" of Jesus emerging from the latest Jesus scholarship demonstrates that each of these constructs, rather than being at irreconcilable odds with the Johannine presentation of Jesus, finds impressive echoes and actualization in John, despite John's autonomous rendering of Jesus and his ministry. One might even make the case that any of these portraits might be sketched *more clearly* from Johannine material than from any of the other Gospels, which is a puzzling prospect if John's irrelevance to historical Jesus studies is taken as an established fact. The fact is, however, that such is *not* a fact but a hypothesis, a hypothesis that has many exceptions and problems to it. One also wonders what might happen if new grids were developed for conducting Jesus research using such second-century works as the Acts of Pilate, the Apocryphon of James, the Dialogue of the Savior, the Gospel of Truth, and the Gospel of Judas—in addition to the Gospel of Thomas—in seeking to establish a new set of criteria for investigating the Jesus of history in ways more consonant with the Johannine witness. How do we know, for instance, that the charismatic and Spirit-emphasizing Jesus of history is not replicated in the pneumatic Jesus of the

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76. John's dualism is somewhat parallel to the dualism of the *War Scroll* of Qumran. The strife between the children of light and the children of darkness connects with John's dualism of decision, and the response to Jesus as the saving/revealing agent of God is itself an eschatological event in John. See Brown 2003, 139–42; Ashton 1991, 205–37.

Fourth Gospel?<sup>77</sup> One could argue a sustained case that John contributes key elements, not only of the historical and political outline of Jesus' ministry, but also of the spiritual character of his work. As a plank in the platform of the de-Johannification of Jesus, the presentation of recent Jesus portraits versus John appears to demonstrate the opposite when examined critically.

In summary, all the planks in the platform of the de-Johannification of Jesus are constructed in response to real problems that need to be addressed, and all have certain strengths. However, when each is considered critically to see how solid it might be, it also betrays considerable weaknesses and multiple exceptions to the norms that are claimed. While John is close to Mark, none of John's similarities are identical. In that sense, the bi-optic view of John and Mark is confirmed as two traditional sources plausibly going back to the ministry of Jesus. Diachronic theories have failed to demonstrate alien material as foundational sources for John, and a two-edition theory of composition is the most likely. John's lateness does not discount the possibility of primitivity, and in fact there is a great deal of detail in John that is best accounted for on the basis of having been earlier rather than later. Criteria for determining historicity are often circular and, being largely constructed out of Synoptic material, thus say very little about John when used to discredit John's historicity. A history of religions analysis of John shows that John is closer to the Synoptics than pagan or Jewish aretologies and mythologies, so arguing derivation from such sources rather than influence is specious. Finally, the portraits of Jesus emerging from Synoptic studies actually affirm John's authenticity rather than discredit it, as each of them may be fulfilled by the Johannine presentation of Jesus with independent lucidity. Despite the rigor with which John has been marginalized from Jesus studies, the above analysis suggests that, because none of these planks possesses compelling integrity, the larger platform itself cannot support much weight. Like the dehistoricization of John, the de-Johannification of Jesus is an equally feeble foundation on which anything of critical worth may be established.

#### FINDINGS

Neither the dehistoricization of John nor the de-Johannification of Jesus is constructed of solid material, so neither is able to support much weight for constructing Gospel or Jesus studies. Indeed, each of the planks in both platforms is

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77. Consider, for instance, Martin Hengel's monograph (1981) in the light of John's pneumatic presentation of Jesus, or consider insights into the Spirit-based ministry of the historical Jesus from the perspective of Gary Burge's monograph (1987) as potential ways forward. If Jesus challenged institutions and society in the name of spirituality and unmediated access to the divine, John as a resource has not yet begun to be tapped for historical Jesus studies.

constructed in response to real problems, but not a single one is compelling in laying a foundation for either platform. Fallacies of logic are evident in many cases, and only parts of the data are considered in most cases. Distortions of Johannine and Synoptic material sometimes appear to make a plank more sturdy, but, when analyzed critically, the facts and procedures themselves raise questions with the analyses and their conclusions. In fact, some of the planks in each platform possess greater weaknesses than strengths, and a critical appraisal of the subject must question sweeping generalizations that are founded on such presumptions.

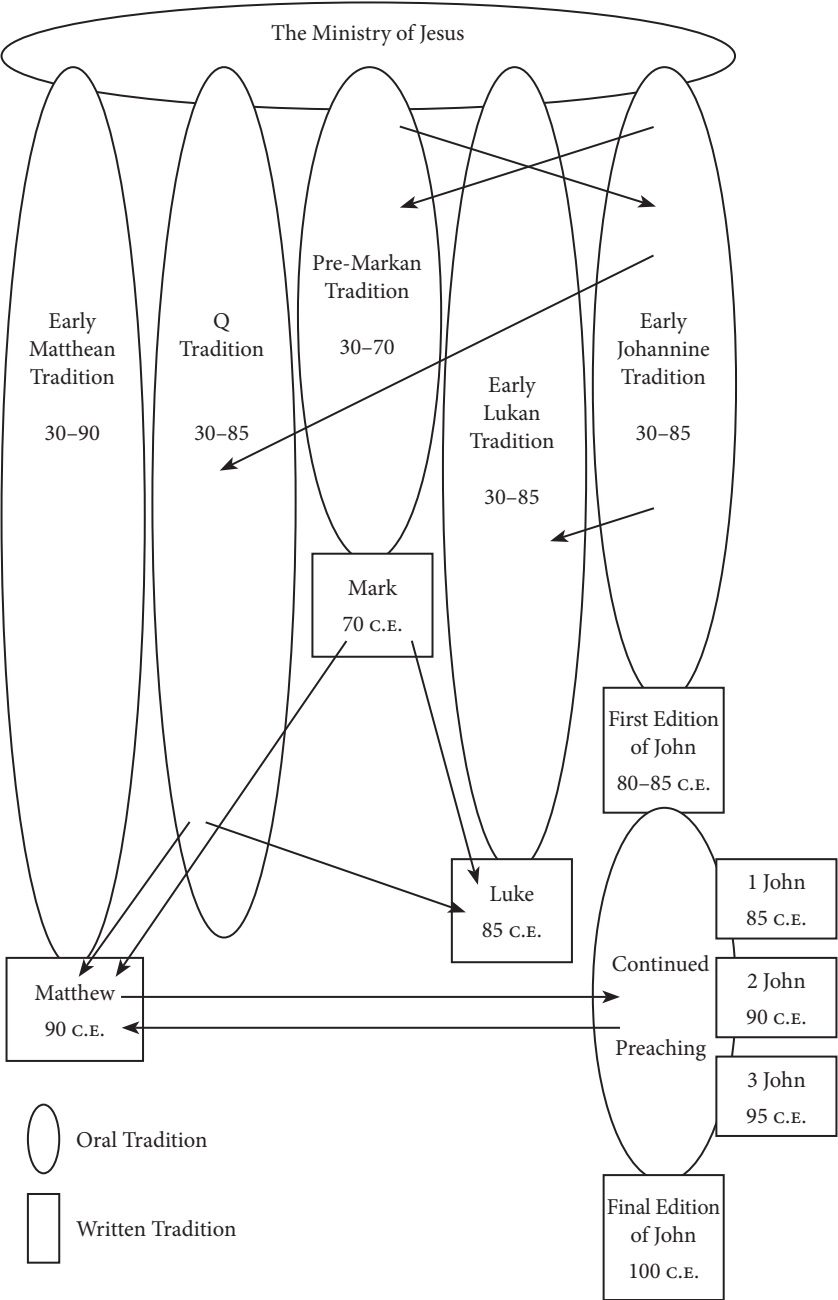
So, in response to our earlier question—Is the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus an open-and-shut case, a “consensus” among critical scholars (which fails to include most of the leading Johannine scholars over the last two centuries), to be embraced as a solid set of platforms on which to construct future investigations?—one might be happy if it were so. Jesus studies could just continue along without Johannine interference, and Johannine studies could just continue without raising historical-critical questions. Unfortunately, neither platform, nor any of the planks composing them, is solid. In the light of the above analysis, the “critically established consensus” is neither; more work remains to be done.<sup>78</sup>

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78. As a proposal for getting the discussion going, appendix 2 below suggests what a nuanced approach might look like. It is developed more fully elsewhere (Anderson 2006b, 127–73), but here it suggests an outline of what Jesus in bi-optic perspective might look like. Appendix 1 below was published first in Anderson 2006b, 126.

While Robert Kysar's essay in this volume questions the bases upon which this theory of interfluentiality is laid, his foreword to *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus* (Anderson 2006b, xvii–xx) is far more positive than his reaction to its presentation in the 2002 Hofrichter volume below (pp. 90–92): “I find Anderson's suggestion of a two-way influence very valuable with numerous implications, such as his theory of a ‘bio-optic perspective on Jesus’. He argues that one can identify the interfluentiality of each of the Synoptics and John, with each bringing its own peculiar perspective (Part III). With such a perspective how then does each of the four Gospels contribute to our understanding of the Jesus of history? This volume challenges biblical scholars to rethink the foundations of much of our study. It will, I believe, make readers assess their own methods and stimulate new discussions of John and the quest for Jesus” (Kysar in Anderson 2006b, xx)

APPENDIX 1  
A CHARTING OF JOHANNINE-SYNOPTIC INTERFLUENTIAL RELATIONS



## APPENDIX 2

## JESUS IN BI-OPTIC PERSPECTIVE: A NUANCED PROPOSAL

If John is excluded from historical studies, the thirty-plus ways that it agrees with the Synoptics should also be excluded (Anderson 2006b, 129). A more adequate approach, however, is to note several ways in which all four canonical Gospel traditions cohere in multiple-attestation ways and to begin with the following nucleus in quest of the historical Jesus with John in the mix. In all four Gospels, Jesus comes as a Jewish prophet healing the sick, challenging religious institutions, speaking with prophetic urgency, and suffering death at the hands of the Romans in Jerusalem. On these and other matters, John and the Synoptics agree.

- A. Dual Attestation: John and the Synoptics
  1. Jesus' association with John the Baptist and the beginning of his public ministry
  2. Jesus' calling of disciples as a corporate venture
  3. A revolt in the desert?
  4. Jesus as a healer; healing on the Sabbath
  5. Jesus' sense of prophetic agency from the Father and religious resistance
  6. Jesus' cleansing of the temple
  7. The culmination of Jesus' ministry: his arrest, trials, and death in Jerusalem
  8. Attestations to appearances and the beginning of the Jesus movement

Despite impressive features of John's historical realism, the Synoptics nonetheless pose several more plausible presentations of Jesus from a historicity standpoint, and these should not be neglected. In particular, Jesus as a Jewish rabbi teaches with parables about the ways of the kingdom, exorcises demons, liberates the socially alienated, and sends out his disciples as agents of change and reform. Jesus in Synoptic perspective declares the irruption of God's reign into human history in ways that make all things new. Each of the Synoptic narratives is crafted with traditional material, targeted audiences, and the theological/rhetorical interests of the Evangelist in mind.

- B. Synoptic Contributions to the Quest for the Jesus of History
  1. Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God in parables and in short, pithy sayings
  2. The messianic secret and the hiddenness of the kingdom
  3. Jesus' healing and exorcizing ministries
  4. Jesus' sending out of his disciples to further the work of the kingdom
  5. Jesus' dining with "sinners" and provocations toward renewal

6. Jesus' cleansing of the temple as an intentional challenge to the restricting of access to God
7. Jesus' teaching on the heart of the law: love of God and humanity
8. Jesus' apocalyptic mission

Despite impressive features of Synoptic historicity, John nonetheless poses several more plausible presentations of Jesus from a historicity standpoint that should not be neglected. In particular, Jesus as a Mosaic agent from God (Deut 18:18:15–22) speaks on the Father's behalf, challenging religious authorities in Jerusalem as well as Galilee. John the Baptist ministers alongside Jesus for a period of time, and Jesus goes to and from Jerusalem over a period of two or more years. Jesus' incident in the temple may well be taken as an inaugural prophetic sign pointing to the spiritual and authentic character of Jewish faith and practice, and first-hand knowledge of Palestine is recrafted for other audiences among the mission churches.

- C. Johannine Contributions to the Quest for the Jesus of History
  1. Jesus' simultaneous ministry alongside John the Baptizer and the prolific availability of purifying power
  2. Jesus' cleansing of the temple as an inaugural prophetic sign
  3. Jesus' travel to and from Jerusalem and his multiyear ministry
  4. Early events in the public ministry of Jesus
  5. Favorable receptions in Galilee among Samaritans, women, and Gentiles
  6. Jesus' Judean ministry and archaeological realism
  7. The Last Supper as a common meal and its proper dating
  8. Jesus' teaching about the way of the Spirit and the reign of truth



PART 2:  
REVIEWS OF THE LITERATURE: HOW DID JOHN  
BECOME THE “SPIRITUAL” GOSPEL?

In organizing literature reviews explaining how John became the “spiritual Gospel,” state-of-the-art analyses of the research were solicited from leading authorities in their respective fields. Bob Kysar, arguably the leading authority on the history of Johannine secondary literature, was invited to develop an analysis of how the Johannine Gospel became dehistoricized within the modern era. Kysar’s reviews of the Johannine literature are legendary in their importance, and his treatments of the wide spectrum of international studies are notably balanced and fair (1975; 1985; 2006). In addition to having written books on preaching from John and commentaries on the Johannine writings (2002; 1986a; 1986b), Kysar’s analysis of John as the “maverick Gospel” continues to be a classic introduction to Johannine issues: literary, historical, and theological (1993). In his latest book (2006), Kysar charts a path from historical-critical approaches to John toward postmodern approaches to the Johannine riddles. In his essay below, some of that voyage is also apparent.

Kysar’s essay is responded to aptly by Marianne Meye Thompson, likewise a leading Johannine scholar who has also done significant work on the historical Jesus (1996). Challenging Käsemann’s claim that John’s Jesus is presented as “God striding over the earth,” Thompson’s first book (1988) shows the full portraiture of the *humanity* of John’s Jesus in ways that cannot be denied. Her treatment of the Father-Son relationship and the presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel (2001) is arguably the most important book on that subject in English, and it again challenges critically the tendency to note John’s high Christology at the expense of its explicitly low and mundane presentations of Jesus. There Thompson highlights clearly the Son’s derivative relation to the Father within the Fourth Gospel. One of the things that comes out in Kysar’s and Thompson’s analyses is the importance of the question: What is meant by *history*? Thompson’s thesis here poses an important challenge for present-day scholars, namely, that history-versus-theology is a modern disjunction that would not have been shared by the Johannine Evangelist. How would “John the theologian” have written history? Probably in the form of a “spiritual gospel,” which is precisely what we have in the Johannine Evangel. These

treatments together trace the developing story of the dehistoricizing of John, providing also valuable insights into the bases for these judgments, assessing their merits as well as their implications.

The next two literature-review essays show something of the development of the de-Johannification of Jesus, first emerging in England and continuing in Germany in the nineteenth century, followed by attending developments in twentieth-century American scholarship. Jack Verheyden is especially well-suited to take on the German scene, as a leading authority on Schleiermacher and nineteenth-century German historical-critical thought (Schleiermacher 1975). Verheyden, a student also of continental and American theological trends in the modern era, brings to this investigation a perspective beyond that of biblical studies, while at the same time contributing to them authoritatively. His probing analyses of what drove the works of Evanson, Bretschneider, Strauss, and Baur provide a lucid and instructive impression of *why* these moves were made, as well as what *was*—and what *is*—at stake.

Mark Allan Powell then catches us up on further developments in the twentieth century and beyond. Powell is considered by Marcus Borg and others to be the leading interpreter of historical Jesus studies of the day,<sup>1</sup> and he has chaired the Historical Jesus Section of the SBL Annual Meetings for the last six years. As such, his insights are not only helpfully descriptive of pivotal scholars' judgments on these matters, but they are also powerful in their analytical probity. In stating why particular moves were made, later interpreters are assisted in making valid judgments upon the contributions of earlier works, allowing progress within the field. Verheyden's and Powell's essays together pose an impressive overview and development of central features of the issues at hand.

One of the judgments Powell makes in both of his papers is that historical and literary obstacles to deconstructive treatments of John's historicity have often not been engaged by critical scholars. They were either ignored or simply stepped over; they were not overturned. With the demise of the Bultmannian synthesis, the previously stepped-over approaches to John's historicity and potential contribution to Jesus studies has needed to be drawn into the mix. Don Carson's commentary on John follows such a path (1991), and he had earlier challenged Johannine scholarship for largely side-stepping the contribution of C. H. Dodd (1981; 1985). Engaging more recent lacunas, his present overview of the last decade or so of Johannine studies exposes the present disarray of the discipline—perhaps illuminating the fact that disparate approaches to Johannine studies continue with little or no engagement of other approaches, often to their own peril. As an analyst of the rhetorical purpose of the Fourth Gospel himself,

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1. In Borg's response to the *QRT* overview of Jesus quests (Anderson 2000b), Marcus Borg describes Powell's book *Jesus as a Figure in History* (1998) as "the clearest and most-balanced survey of contemporary Jesus scholarship" (Borg 2002, 27).

Carson's (1982b; 1987; 2005) invitation of interdisciplinary integration is a path he himself follows.

These essays together set the stage for reflecting upon the complex histories of engagement that have emerged within these fields, and they lay the framework for advancing the best of critical projects in the future. They show something of the history of Johannine and Jesus studies in particular, while also noting their engagement together as a result. Even if a particular solution to a problem is found wanting, a better understanding of the problem itself often leads to the discerning of fresh approaches to it. What we also see in these literature reviews is the degree to which particular advances assist the interpreter, while at the same time calling for modesty of claim. As new knowledge is advanced and as older issues are analyzed in the light of new discoveries, evidence itself takes on new forms of organization and impression. Former dichotomies are challenged and new possibilities emerge. This leads us, then, to the grinding of new lenses through which to view our subjects, holding open the likelihood that an advance in one direction may impact a new set of understandings in others. Those matters, of course, will be taken up in part 3.



# THE DEHISTORICIZING OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Robert Kysar

What do we mean when we speak of “dehistoricizing”? *Webster’s Dictionary* says that to “historicize” means to make, or make seem, historical or historically real. To dehistoricize therefore means to deprive something or someone of historicity or “historical reality.” With postmodernism peeking around the corner, a definition of history is necessary, but I will suspend that question until the end of this essay. For now, I will use history and historical in the positivistic sense, assuming that they refer to actual discoverable “facts” of the past (whatever a fact may be). That is, history has to do with discerning, discovering, and/or understanding events and persons of a past time.

The question is why both scholars and, to a lesser degree, churches have recently not regarded the Fourth Gospel as a primary source for the historical Jesus or even for the tradition generated by Jesus and the earliest church. Implicit here is another question: Why, in both theory and practice, has the Fourth Gospel been relegated to a different role in historical research than the Synoptic Gospels?

According to Eusebius, such a tendency has roots as early as Clement of Alexandria, who reportedly claimed that Mark, inspired by Peter’s preaching, wrote his Gospel in Rome and distributed it to all who requested it. Eusebius quotes Clement as saying, “But last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospels, being urged by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a *spiritual Gospel*.”<sup>1</sup> John was not interested in recording the facts, because they were already available. Rather, the Fourth Gospel was a kind of interpretation of those facts and thus was explicitly treated as a spiritual Gospel by church leaders in the third to fifth centuries. Such a distinction between the Synoptics and John embedded itself in tradition, so that we often find Clement’s view adopted by contemporary critics in search of the “historical Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

However, the precise meaning of the word “spiritual” in Clement’s view is debated. D. A. Carson (1991, 29), for instance, calls Eusebius’ remark “teasing,”

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1. Quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7, emphasis added.

2. See, e.g., E. P. Sanders 1993, 73.

and declares, “[i]t certainly does not mean ‘spiritual’ as opposed to ‘historical’; it may mean ‘allegorical’ or ‘symbol-laden.’” Hence, it is not entirely clear that Clement dehistoricized the Gospel by characterizing it in this famous or notorious way. Nor is it entirely clear why “spiritual” should be thought of in opposition to “historical.” Could history not also be spiritual?<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, *if* there was a pre-Christian Gnosticism, and *if* the later gnostic interpretation was at all true to the text of the Gospel, then we would need to attribute the earliest known “spiritual reading” of John to the gnostic Christians, especially Heracleon (whom Origen cited). In this case, the adjective “spiritual” would describe, among other matters, the redeemer myth upon which the Fourth Evangelist supposedly interpreted Jesus and his ministry.<sup>4</sup> The parallels with the *Gospel of Truth* offer further evidence of a gnostic-like feature in the Gospel of John.<sup>5</sup> It would be interesting to speculate on the significance of the church’s adoption of a spiritual reading of John that originated with “heretics,” but my own understanding of the relationship of Gnosticism and the Johannine tradition steers me away from such a proposal.

The purpose in this essay, however, is not to trace this dehistoricized view of the Fourth Gospel in the history of its interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Rather, it is to investigate various movements in Johannine interpretation in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the present. I will discuss certain currents of scholarship that appear to demonstrate a tug of war between efforts, on the one hand, to find an authentic early Christian tradition in (or behind) the Fourth Gospel and, on the other hand, to deny that the Gospel evidences such a tradition. In other words, the direction scholarship has taken in this matter has not been singular, direct, and uncomplicated but rather complex and multidirectional. For instance, the efforts to reconstruct the history of the community behind the Fourth Gospel have actually both historicized and dehistoricized the Gospel, depending on *which history* one seeks. Scholars have attempted both to locate the Gospel of John in a specific historical context and at a certain point in the history of a Christian community out of which the Gospel emerged. In doing so, however, many such reconstructions sometimes beg the issue of whether or not, or to what degree, the tradition that developed and was incorporated into the Gospel had historical roots in either Jesus or the first Christian movement. Such theories implicitly tend to account for Johannine material as it was preserved and transmitted *at the time of the composition of the Gospel*. Ironically, the same efforts to set the Gospel in its historical

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3. See the treatments of the “spiritual meaning” of John, which do not seem to presuppose an opposition between the spiritual and the historical. For example, L. William Countryman 1994 and Demetrius R. Dumm 2001.

4. See Rudolf Bultmann 1955b, 2:12–14; see also Bultmann 1957b, 162–71.

5. Rudolf Schnackenburg (1968–82, 1:194) provides a summary list of these similarities.

6. For that analysis, see Kysar 1999a, 609–19.

context can implicitly dehistoricize it of authentic Jesus material or material from the earliest tradition (although this has not been true of all reconstructions, as we will see below).<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this essay cannot survey all Johannine studies in which we might find the tension between historicizing and dehistoricizing, nor will my discussion even of selected trends be exhaustive. Since the papers of Verheyden and Powell below deal directly with the question of the Gospel of John and the quest for the historical Jesus, I will not treat the degree to which scholars have or have not claimed the Fourth Gospel is valuable for such a quest; however, it may be necessary for us to move close to the vague line demarcating these two approaches.

The currents of scholarship I will investigate with regard to their contributions to the dehistoricizing of John are: (1) discussions of the authorship of John; (2) changes in ways of conceiving the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels and John; (3) understandings of the Gospel genre and its particular use in the Fourth Gospel; (4) the search for early oral tradition in or behind John; (5) written source theories that leave open the possibility of a contact with Jesus and/or early tradition; (6) the impact of new criticisms on the view of the historical quality of John; and (7) the issue of what is "history."

### 1. THE AUTHORSHIP OF JOHN

The supposition that the Fourth Gospel is a "spiritual" treatment of the Jesus story does not, of course, require that the author was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry or that he was someone other than John, Son of Zebedee, the Beloved Disciple; yet viewing the Evangelist as an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry allows us to attribute much more historical value to it. The arguments over the authorship of John were not as frequent in the late twentieth century as they were earlier.<sup>8</sup> In many cases, the question of authorship has been absorbed into the reconstruction of the Gospel's development over several periods of time and in a number of stages; consequently, it has become far more complicated than simply identifying some single person as the document's writer.<sup>9</sup> However, interest in demonstrating the likelihood that the Fourth Evangelist was an eyewitness to the historical Jesus is still very much alive.<sup>10</sup>

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7. John A. T. Robinson correctly suggests that "if one is not careful [the redaction critical attention to the Johannine community] can lead one into the *non sequitur* that the more the Gospel tells us about the Johannine community the less it tells us about Jesus" (1985, 29–30).

8. One of the most careful arguments favoring the view that the Gospel was the work of an eyewitness remains H. P. V. Nunn 1952.

9. I state my own view elsewhere (Kysar 1993, 25–26).

10. John Ashton offers a concise survey of views of John's authorship before Bultmann (1991, 15–27). He comments, however, that what we know about the "Gospel's origins" is far more important than "the quest for the evangelist's identity" (22).

D. A. Carson provides one example of the contemporary interest in pursuing this possibility. He meticulously argues that the Beloved Disciple is John, son of Zebedee, and is the Evangelist, but admits that his position is still “tentative.” Having established that perspective, Carson contends, for instance, that John’s placement of the so-called “cleansing of the temple” (2:12–17) is very possibly an accurate reporting of Jesus’ activity.<sup>11</sup>

John A. T. Robinson’s position is only slightly different. He claims that it is not necessary to know the identity of the Evangelist in order to recognize that the Gospel reports history and that actual events shaped the narrative. In other words, the narrative’s historicity speaks for itself, regardless of authorship. Nonetheless, he argues that in all probability the Evangelist was John, son of Zebedee, the Beloved Disciple (who may well have been a relative of Jesus).<sup>12</sup>

Raymond E. Brown’s view of the “authorship” of John exemplifies those who believe that the Gospel developed through several stages on the basis of an eyewitness *source*. He illustrates how one might conceive of the Gospel as a product of a long process of composition and still maintain that its origin was in the memory of one who personally experienced the historical Jesus.<sup>13</sup> In the first volume of his commentary, Brown proposed that John, son of Zebedee, was the Beloved Disciple and the author of the first stage of the document’s development, but that a disciple of this John was responsible for stages two through four and should be regarded as the Evangelist.<sup>14</sup> Even if John, son of Zebedee, “is the source of the Johannine tradition ... there are many indications that he was not the final writer of the tradition.”<sup>15</sup> Later, however, in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Brown abandoned his claim that the Beloved Disciple was John, son of Zebedee, while continuing to advocate that the allusive character was an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry. Moreover, Brown clarifies his view: “I am not claiming that every instance involving the Beloved Disciple is historically accurate.”<sup>16</sup> Rudolf

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11. Carson 1991, 68–81 and 177–78. See also, Gary M. Burge 2001, 35–46, esp. 40.

12. John A. T. Robinson 1985, 36–122. Efforts to argue that the Fourth Evangelist’s style evidences an Aramaic origin (or a Semitic coloring) seem to have diminished. Schnackenburg concludes, “[t]he Semitic colouring will make one hesitate to question [the Evangelist’s] Jewish origin while the correct Greek ... forces one to suppose that [the Evangelist] lived for a long time in a Hellenistic environment” (1968–82, 1:110).

13. Charles H. Talbert points out that most scholars would deny that the Gospel as it stands was written by an eyewitness, but many “are willing to talk about an eyewitness at the root of the tradition that developed over a long period into the Gospel of John” (1992, 61–62).

14. Brown 1966–70, 1:xcviii–ci. See a similar view in Annie Jaubert 1976, 47–53.

15. Brown 1962; 1965, 200. Brown calls this one of the “limitations” of the use of John as a historical source. In the introduction to his commentary, he concludes, “although we think that the Fourth Gospel reflects historical memories of Jesus, the greater extent of the theological reshaping of those memories makes Johannine material much harder to use in the quest of the historical Jesus than most Synoptic materials” (1966–70, 1:xlx).

16. Brown 1979, 31–34; quotation, 32 n. 42.



Schnackenburg similarly contends that the Beloved Disciple was the source of the tradition that a later Hellenistic figure interpreted and recorded.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, an eyewitness source is responsible for the tradition that was later committed to writing by another figure, and therefore the eyewitness is one step removed from the actual composition of the document.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to these views of an eyewitness author or source of the Johannine tradition, some cautiously but clearly deny either of these possibilities.<sup>19</sup> Barnabas Lindars resolutely claims that one cannot build a viable argument for any one figure, so we simply do not and cannot know who the author was. The Beloved Disciple is a model of true discipleship and hence a reference to every reader's possibilities. For Lindars this means, "the Fourth Gospel can lay no claim to special historical reliability."<sup>20</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray is also content to leave the author anonymous.<sup>21</sup> By and large, by the late twentieth century many scholars seemed comfortable to say simply that we will never be able to name the author of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>22</sup>

Uncertainty about the identity of its author, however, has not prevented some scholars from maintaining that the Gospel has some historical authority. D. Moody Smith, for instance, maintains, "the ascription of the Gospel to some authoritative witness is clearly a part of the document as we have received it, and must be dealt with seriously.... John may contain historical information, even at those points where it departs from the other Gospels" (1999, 27).

In the past twenty years, Johannine literary criticism has tended to deemphasize still further both authorship and historical authority. Francis J. Moloney represents this view when he briefly describes the traditional issues in authorship, concludes that we cannot be certain of any of the propositions, and then asserts, "[t]he authority of this Gospel flows from the way it tells the story of God and God's Son, Jesus Christ." While he respects those who investigate the history behind the text, Moloney is interested in what the narrative does to the reader.<sup>23</sup>

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17. Schnackenburg 1968–82, 1:101–4. Udo Schnelle (1992) advances another kind of proposal for the occasion and authorship of John. Martin Hengel contends that the Evangelist was John the Elder. Nonetheless, the Elder's work was based on an eyewitness whose testimony is evident in the seven signs of the Gospel (1989, 102).

18. Kenneth Grayston prefers to speak of a "composing editor" rather than an "author" (1990, 176).

19. Tom Thatcher contends that the three best alternatives for understanding the beloved disciple are a purely legendary or "ideal" figure, a legendary figure created to compliment another figure (such as Peter), or "a legendary expansion of a real person" (2001b, 96).

20. Barnabas Lindars 1972, 34; repr. in Lindars, Edwards, and Court 2000, 45.

21. George R. Beasley-Murray 1987, lxxiv–lxxv. See also Gail O'Day 1995, 498–500.

22. See Robert Kysar 1985, 2436–39; see also Kysar 1992, 919–20.

23. Francis J. Moloney 1998, 6–9 and 11–13, quote 8–9. See also Moloney 1993, 7–9.

Another literary critic finds it is enough simply to say that the historical author constructed the narrator of the story (Stibbe 1993, 15).

On the whole, while some argue that an eyewitness was the source of the tradition embedded in Fourth Gospel, or even its author, “mainstream North American Johannine scholarship” (if there is such a phenomenon) tends to be cautious of such claims, even while some believe that the Gospel has historical value evident in the narrative itself.

## 2. JOHN AND THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Two of the most significant developments in the study of the relationship between John and the Synoptics were, first, the rise of redaction criticism and, second, the weakening of the conviction that the Fourth Evangelist used one or more of these Gospels as a source. Both of these impact the question before us.

*Redaction criticism* had the effect of closing the gap between John and the Synoptics—of leveling the playing field, as it were. Insofar as the Synoptics were considered the historical documents and John the theological and spiritual Gospel, redaction criticism demonstrated the theological nature of the first three Gospels. In one sense, redaction criticism partly *dehistoricized the Synoptics*, even if it did not entirely eliminate confidence in them as a source of the historical Jesus and the earliest Christian tradition.<sup>24</sup> At the very least, redaction criticism joined form and source criticisms in making the discernment of purely historical original materials all the more difficult, or at least complicated. With that change, John no longer appeared so radically different from the Synoptics.<sup>25</sup> To the contrary, all four Gospels were understood as theological documents.<sup>26</sup> The rise of redaction criticism did not, of itself, dehistoricize John; it diminished the artificial opposition of the factual versus the theological (or spiritual).

*John's independence from the Synoptics* brought another important result. Of course, the question of John's use of one or more of the Synoptics has not been definitively answered and remains open (and probably always will), as D. Moody

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24. A notable example of this dehistoricizing is found in the redaction critical study by William Wrede (1971), whose investigation of the “messianic secret” in Mark stripped the historical Jesus of responsibility for concealing his messiahship and attributed it instead to the early church.

25. For example, the theory that the Johannine community was expelled from the synagogue tended to attribute the Gospel's harsh words to and about the “Jews” not to the historical Jesus, but to the later tradition.

26. Brown claims that the change in the understanding of John and the Synoptics put to rest the assumption that “the Johannine tradition is not original, but simply an imaginative reshuffling of the Synoptic details according to some theological motif” (1962; 1965, 194).

Smith has clearly shown.<sup>27</sup> However, after the successful work of Gardner-Smith (1938) a short-lived consensus emerged that John did not depend on any Synoptic Gospel, which removed one of the props holding up the late dating of John.<sup>28</sup> If it is no longer necessary to maintain that John wrote *after* the Synoptics, the date of the Gospel's composition need not be as late as has sometimes been argued. Furthermore, insofar as scholarship had tended to view the Synoptics as the standard of historicity against which John was measured (i.e., John is historical only if it agrees with the Synoptics), the literary independence of the Fourth Gospel nudged us toward thinking again about the possibilities of its historical value.<sup>29</sup> J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin (1968, 17) say this very well: "if the independence of the FG with regard to the others is established, the way is clear for taking its claim to be a source of historically reliable material much more seriously than has often been done in the past." Not only was Clement possibly wrong in calling the Synoptics factual and John spiritual; he may also have been incorrect in assuming that John was written *after* the Synoptics!

Freeing John from dependence on the Synoptics combined with a number of other insights, all of which nibbled away at the assumption that John was the last Gospel to be written. First was the recognition that the late dating of John depended, at least in part, on an evolutionary view of early Christian Christology.<sup>30</sup> When we realized that views of Christ in the first century did not neatly and necessarily evolve from the lowest to the highest, we became willing to entertain the possibility that aspects of Johannine Christology represented earlier Christian views instead of exclusively late ones.<sup>31</sup> Second, through the nineteenth and into the mid-twentieth century, many believed that the setting for John was Hellenistic, gnostic, and/or Mandaean,<sup>32</sup> but when the Jewish character of the Fourth Gospel appeared more and more likely (aided by the discovery of the Qumran

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27. D. Moody Smith 2001. An opposing view is represented by Thomas L. Brodie's affirmation of John's dependence on the Synoptics and hence its limited value to the search for either the historical Jesus or the earliest Christian tradition (see Brodie 1993, 145).

28. More nuanced views of the relationship between John and the Synoptics are continually proposed, such as Ismo Dunderberg's argument (1994) that the Synoptics were literary sources for a later edition of the Fourth Gospel.

29. See Brown 1962; 1965, 190–94. Marianne Meye Thompson writes, "it is obvious that the baseline against which John is measured is the Synoptic Gospels" (1996, 26).

30. It seems the thesis of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1864) has been the most influential in this regard. For a recent critical response, see Peter Balla 1998.

31. C. F. D. Moule challenged the idea of an evolution in Christology from the lower to the higher and sought to use a "developmental" scheme in which estimates of Jesus are "not successive additions of something new, but only the drawing out and articulating of what is there. They represent various stages in the development of perception" (1977, 2–3). A. K. M. Adam argues that William Wrede stressed evolution in New Testament theology because of his commitment to "chronological determination" (1995a, 72–74).

32. For example, see Rudolf Bultmann 1997, esp. 42–43.

library), it moved our image of the Johannine community closer to Christianity's origins.<sup>33</sup> Third, the demise or reformulation of the idea that John was gnostic (or antignostic) also led scholars who thought Gnosticism was a product of the second century C.E. to consider the possibility that it was written earlier than had been supposed. These and other scholarly currents reopened the debate about the date of John's writing. A date at the end of the first century remains the most popular,<sup>34</sup> but the reasons for it have significantly eroded. It is now sustained as much by recent tradition—in the absence of other possibilities—as it is based upon evidence. If John were written earlier, might the Gospel actually represent Jesus and the early Christian tradition more than we had thought?

Regardless of the date of its composition, some have come to believe that John is as historically valuable as the Synoptics are. Edward Schillebeeckx, for example, carefully differentiates between the themes of John and of the Synoptics and proposes that the Fourth Gospel does “systematically” what the Synoptics only attempt unsystematically. Moreover, John “seeks to *make present to the church* the reminiscence of what Jesus had said and done.” He concludes that the Johannine tradition roots in the historical Jesus through an eyewitness:

Therefore, in principle the Gospel of John has as much value as the synoptic Gospels as a source for historical knowledge of Jesus; indeed, it is in all probability historically more reliable than they are for events in Judaea—though for the most part detailed historical substantiation is impossible here.<sup>35</sup>

As early as 1959, John A. T. Robinson anticipated what he called “The New Look on the Fourth Gospel.” Having declared that the standard views of the Fourth Gospel are no longer tenable, he writes, “what marks the newer approach is ... an openness to recognize that in the Johannine tradition we may at points be as near to the Jesus of history as in the Synoptic Gospels.”<sup>36</sup> In *The Priority of John* (1985), Robinson argues at greater length that John should be regarded as “procedurally

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33. See Brown 1962; 1965, 188. A. J. B. Higgins (1964, 183) thinks the tradition behind the Johannine Son of Man sayings is Palestinian and evidence that John “had access to reliable historical traditions.” Marianne Meye Thompson (1996, 27) names two developments in the twentieth century that force us to reconsider the Gospel's historical value: the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which established the Palestinian character of the Gospel, and the move toward regarding John as independent of the Synoptics.

34. See, for example, D. Moody Smith 1995, 5–6.

35. Edward Schillebeeckx 1980, 347–48. In his discussion of the criteria for determining historicity in the Gospels, Schillebeeckx (1979, 91) had earlier written, “something found in only one tradition can still be an authentic record of Jesus, even if it is found, for instance, only in John (e.g., the historical possibility that as a member of John's entourage Jesus too baptized, John 3:22).”

36. John A. T. Robinson 1959; 1962, 100. In this same period and with some of the same goals as Robinson's work, see A. J. B. Higgins 1960.

prior” to the other Gospels and that they should be evaluated in the light of John, not the other way around.<sup>37</sup> Whatever one may think of Robinson’s proposal and exactly what he meant by “procedurally prior,” he saw the possibility of rehistoricizing John, if the standard critical assumptions of his day were put aside. Indeed, so different are the scholarly trends in Johannine research today that some argue for the notion that *some of the Synoptic Gospels may have used John as a source rather than the other way around*.<sup>38</sup> We will return to this thesis below.

D. Moody Smith, however, has provided us with a different view. C. K. Barrett clung persistently to his thesis that the Fourth Evangelist used at least the Gospel of Mark, if not the other two Synoptics, and on the basis of this thesis ventured to say, “the chronicler can sometimes (though less frequently than is often thought) pick out from John simple and sound historical material.”<sup>39</sup> In the second edition of *John among the Gospels*, Smith goes further than Barrett. He adds a new chapter to conclude his revised book, the purpose of which is to argue with painstaking exactitude that the Fourth Gospel was independent of the Synoptics, and especially of Mark (Smith 2001, 195–241). However, alongside that argument, Smith develops the view that *John may be historically reliable at those points where the Fourth Gospel differs from Mark and the other Synoptics*. Particularly when the Johannine difference does not betray clear “theological or narrative interests,” there may be historical reliability (Smith 2001, 234–35).

In his usual careful and precise manner, Smith first treats a number of features in the setting and presentation of Jesus’ ministry as found in John and the Synoptics, each of which may exemplify instances of John’s superior historical reliability (e.g., the chronology of Jesus’ ministry). However, he mostly compares in detail the passion stories in the two Gospels. For each instance where John differs from Mark’s narrative, Smith asks how we might explain the difference and what it means. Eliminating those that are clearly results of John’s peculiar theological emphases, he then explores the possibility of the Fourth Evangelist’s being the more historically accurate. For example,

John’s account of a brief hearing before Annas, and no Sanhedrin trial at all—also no witnesses, no verdict, no condemnation for (Christological) blasphemy—has a much better claim to historicity than Mark’s elaborate scene with its theologically loaded concluding verdict. (Smith 2001, 210)

To my knowledge, no North American scholar has analyzed the relation between the Synoptics and John as rigorously as Smith has. Not surprisingly, in

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37. Robinson 1985, 5. Robinson speaks of “the long shadow of dependence” that has prevented scholars of thinking of the possibility that John was written earlier than often supposed (1985, 10–23).

38. For example, see Mark A. Matson 2001; 2002; Paul N. Anderson 2002a.

39. C. K. Barrett 1978, 141; see also 15 and 42–46.

this case too his work is both admirable and, in many ways, convincing. Nonetheless, when he comes to the point of assessing the historicity of a unique Johannine feature, it becomes obvious how very difficult it is to distinguish fact from imagination. For instance, note the kind of language Smith is forced to use in these assessments. He speaks of “historical likelihood,” “reasonable,” “conceivable,” “plausible,” or “requires no stretch of the imagination to think [these events] did happen”; or, as he says of the Caiaphas scene, “It is more difficult than may at first appear to imagine how John simply created the Caiaphas scene (11:45–53) on the basis of Mark 14:1–2” (Smith 2001, 215, 226, 230, 235, 222). It surprises none of us that Smith is so careful in drawing some of his conclusions, but in this case the language seems due to the difficulty of the subject matter.

This is not so much a criticism of Smith’s profoundly important work as it is a recognition of the difficulty of determining whether or not some statement or story is an accurate historical reference. Might the nonhistorical sometimes be conceivable, likely, reasonable, and plausible? The judgment is fraught with subjectivity and takes for granted some understanding of what constitutes historicity. Smith observes, “while verisimilitude does not guarantee historicity, it is for historians its *sine qua non*” (Smith 2001, 231). Still, who can determine what appears real and what does not? My standard for verisimilitude is quite different from some who claim to have witnessed visitors from outer space. Once again the discussion takes us to the question of criteria, this time the standards of judgment for what is historical and what is imaginary.

Consideration of the relationship between John and the Synoptics is perhaps the best place to introduce Maurice Casey’s attempt to trace christological development and “identity change” in the first century. Casey represents a radically different way of assessing the historical value of John in relationship to the other Gospels. He contends that, because of internal cultural developments, the Johannine community broke all ties with its Jewish origins when it claimed that Jesus was God and became incarnate in the man Jesus. Therefore, John is not only “historically inaccurate” but also diametrically opposed to all other christological affirmations in the New Testament, which are grounded in Jewish thought. Because of the Johannine community’s Gentile nature, it separated itself from the true, historical origin of Christianity and from Jesus himself in order to hold the community together with common doctrine.<sup>40</sup> Applying his historical model, Casey concludes that the Johannine church deliberately dehistoricized itself and intentionally parted ways with the Synoptics.

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40. Maurice Casey 1991, 11–40; quotation 24. More recently Stephen J. Patterson (1998) has argued that the Johannine portrayal of Jesus is of little use in the search for the historical Jesus.

Notwithstanding Casey's provocative argument, several scholarly currents related to John and the Synoptics have in recent decades opened the way for a more serious consideration of the Fourth Gospel as a historical source.

### 3. THE GOSPEL GENRE

Efforts to comprehend the nature and origin of the genre that Mark christened "Gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον) continue without a final resolution. The issue that relates to our topic is evident: To what degree does the Gospel genre require the reporting of the history (what really happened) of the person who is the subject of the good news? Old and still popular views of the Gospels suppose that these documents are in essence no different from biographies.<sup>41</sup> The Christian Gospels report a peculiar biography, since the historical "facts" themselves comprise the good news. Therefore, simply to say that the purpose of the genre is not to report history but to proclaim the good news does not settle the question.<sup>42</sup>

A common "intention" (or aspiration) lurking behind many of the various ways in which Johannine scholars have conceived and expressed the relationship of history and faith in the Fourth Gospel entails the distinctive character of history in Johannine thought. Edwyn Clement Hoskyns's effort to penetrate the problem of history in the Fourth Gospel is still worth considering and provides a starting point for this discussion. According to Hoskyns (1947, 126), the eschatological significance of Jesus and his history renders chronological history irrelevant. To be sure, Christ "only serves to press home the supreme and unique significance of the history as the place where God has now, in Jesus, once and for all confronted [humans] with those last things which have absolute importance." The history related by the Fourth Gospel is history transformed by the presence of God's own truth. Therefore, history is important to the Gospel message, but not the ordinary chronological linear history we take for granted.<sup>43</sup>

Hoskyns deliberately redefines history, or at least "Gospel history." We find a similar redefinition in Heinrich Schlier's work (1971). He proposes an essentialistic view of historical events that seeks the nature (meaning?) of chronological events behind or beneath the facts and claims that the Fourth Evangelist accomplished this perception through the inspiration of the Paraclete. C. K. Barrett, too, is careful to insist that the Fourth Evangelist combined history and interpretation and actually affirmed history over against the gnostic view that would deny it any

41. For example, Talbert 1988.

42. John Ashton 1991, 432, attempts this sort of resolution.

43. As early as 1896 Martin Kähler attacked the life of Jesus movement saying, "*The historical Jesus of modern authors conceals from us the living Christ*" (1964, 43, emphasis original). In his introduction to these two essays, Braaten states that it was the objectivism of modern history that solicited Kähler's polemic (18).



role in God's saving plan. Jesus was a real historical person, but John intended an "impressionistic" portrait and not a biographical photograph of him.<sup>44</sup> The Fourth Gospel then "universalizes" the meaning of Christ: "John's achievement was to liberate the universal significance of Jesus.... the Jesus of history really did transcend the limitations of time and space" (Barrett 1982, 131).

Franz Mussner (1965, 45) speaks of "historical reason" and proposes that the "Johannine mode of vision is that of a believing and informed witness who, in remembrance, 'sees' his subject, Jesus of Nazareth, in such a way that the latter's hidden mystery becomes 'visible' and expressible for the Church in the kerygma." This vision "renders possible the transposition of knowledge obtained by it into the testimony of kerygma." The historical dimension of John's Gospel is empirical history "transposed" into what we might call "kerygmatic history" (Kysar 1975, 179–85). D. Moody Smith (1999, 27) puts it slightly differently when he asserts that the Fourth Gospel reports history and that we can learn something about the historical Jesus from John, yet it is not history for history's sake but history put to the service of theology. The concept of kerygmatic history recalls Ernst Fuchs's effort to speak of the "salvation event" that the historical Jesus brought into language; but while "the salvation event began *with* Jesus.... it later continued *without* him" (Fuchs 1964, 190).

Marianne Meye Thompson's article in the Moody Smith *Festschrift* is one of the most interesting of recent efforts to reconsider the historical value of the Fourth Gospel and the relationship between its presentation of Christ and the historical Jesus. She notes that John's story is often but mistakenly regarded as nonhistorical because it does not provide a convincing picture of what "really happened," which Thompson takes to be the essence of history. Such a view supposes that the Synoptics reflect a verisimilitude that we do not find in John, and Thompson rightly challenges any easy and vague distinction between "history" and "theology." She then turns upside down the argument that John's "high" Christology is clearly not historical. Is John's presentation of Jesus' absolute dependence on God not more likely than the implicit assumptions in the Synoptics that Jesus himself possessed extraordinary power? Moreover, "John's reserve in applying to the earthly Jesus the full range of later christological titles indicates that there are limits beyond which [the Fourth Evangelist] does not venture" (Thompson 1996, 30). Add to this that the Fourth Gospel presents what may be a more convincing motive for Jesus' execution than the one offered in the Synoptics, and we have reason to look further for historical data in John. Consequently, the issue is not whether John employs more interpretation in reporting history than do the other Evangelists, but whether the Johannine interpretative perspective runs parallel to that of the Synoptics. Thompson believes it does, even though

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44. Barrett 1978, 141–42. Brown contends that the Fourth Gospel never pretends to be a history (1962; 1965, 199).



the Fourth Gospel's interpretation operates on a "different plane" than that of the Synoptics (an expression that begs for clarification). She concludes her essay by reminding us that there is no way of "verifying" claims to historical accuracy. The real question, of course, is "how one defines 'historical.'"<sup>45</sup>

Thompson invites us to look again at Johannine Christology and ask what those passages suggest about the historical Jesus. She correctly dodges the question of what is historical (Thompson 1996, 25, 37 n. 15), contending that it is beyond the scope of her article. She takes what seems to her to be the operative understanding of history in the whole debate of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. "What actually happened" may seem a viable category for discussion of the past—what would a video camera have recorded? However, Thompson knows that such a definition of history is vulnerable to criticism. One must ask, of course, what actually happened *for whom*? Who referees the line between "happened" and "did not happen?" Still, Thompson brings us to the heart of the issue of historicizing and dehistoricizing, namely, *the question of what is history*.

The question of history in the Fourth Gospel comes eventually to what we think *the role of positivistic history is in the actual proclamation of the Gospel message*.<sup>46</sup> There are efforts to speak of history and meaning, fact and faith, occurrence and interpretation—in each case posing a relationship between what we might observe simply with normal eyesight (the apparently "public" occurrence) and what occurs to us to be the significance (in this case, ultimate significance) of what we see. The stumbling block is where one comes down on the continuum between these two poles. Shall we claim that the Gospel message itself is implicit in the historical facts, regardless of the observer's perception? Or, shall we insist that—whatever historical facts there may be in the "Jesus story"—the good news of God's act in Christ always entails the necessity of a peculiar perception, something more than the recognition of "what really happened"? It is no wonder that the issue often gets submerged in favor of a simpler understanding of the source of the earliest Johannine tradition. We are perhaps more comfortable in speculating on that question than on the theological issue of faith and history.

The Gospel genre may be better understood by reference to Bultmann's understanding of the meaning of history, even though that view is now dated. Bultmann confronted the issue of the relationship between chronological history and historical meaning in his Gifford Lectures of 1955. In effect, by arguing for the subjective dimension of historical research, he undermined the distinction

45. Thompson 1996, 34. Her attention to this question follows logically from her effective defense of the portrayal of Jesus' humanity in the Fourth Gospel (see Thompson 1988).

46. This question entails the role of the Paraclete in the author's representation of the historical Jesus. William Loader (1989, 190–204) is one who contends that the Fourth Evangelist furthered "a tradition of creative portrayal of the living Christ without particular interest in the earthly Jesus of history."

between fact and faith, or perception and interpretation, discussed above. While he claims that history contains meaning within itself, he insists, “[h]istory gains meaning only when the historian ... stands within history and takes part in history.... [T]he object of historical knowledge is ... an activity of thought.” Since subjectivity and objectivity are inseparable, Bultmann can say, “historical knowledge is ‘existential’ knowledge.”<sup>47</sup> Or, stated more vividly, “Jesus’ life on earth does not become an item of the historical past, but constantly remains present reality” (Bultmann 1951–55, 2:49). His challenge of the object-subject dichotomy is remarkably contemporary and may still provide a way beyond the impasse between so-called fact and faith.

However one chooses to express the relationship between history and message, it is integral to the essence of the Gospel genre, at least in contemporary interpretation. In the case of the Fourth Gospel, it may be especially difficult to distinguish history from interpretation and the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. This Gospel has long been known for its presentation of ambiguity, double meaning, and dialectical thought. To borrow the idea of “genre bending” from Harold Attridge (2002), the ambiguity produced by the way the Evangelist treats different literary genre might carry over into the matter of history in the Gospel. That is to say, it may be impossible to distinguish history and interpretation in this Gospel, because, as genre, the two are bent toward one another (or blended) in a confusing way. On the one hand, the Fourth Gospel speaks of the historical reality of the Word becoming flesh and tells a healing story as primitive-sounding as that of the blind man (9:1–7). On the other hand, the Johannine Jesus at times seems to deny historical verisimilitude (e.g., 2:24–25; 6:19–21, 61). Just as the Fourth Gospel’s language is filled with mixed meanings, so too, the Gospel genre is handled in such a way as to become ambiguous in its presentation.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Johannine genre confusion is, in one sense, a literary form of Bultmann’s insistence that in historical perception, object and self merge.

How one construes the relationship between history and interpretation largely determines to what degree one either “historicizes” or “dehistoricizes” the Gospel of John. The issue of history and interpretation now entails something far more radical even than Bultmann’s existential view of history and mythology. The new issue is a current construal of the question of what is history, a matter to which we will return below.

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47. Rudolf Bultmann 1957a, 119, 133. See also the still relevant collection of articles from the symposium on the theology of Bultmann (Braaten and Harrisville 1962). Years ago Van A. Harvey (1966, 217) pointed out that we are forced to use the distinction between interpretation and fact because “there is no *one* significance to any event.”

48. I use the word ambiguity synonymously with polyvalence. That is, by ambiguity I *do not mean* necessarily that there are two or more possible meanings but only one “correct” meaning. To be ambiguous implies there are numerous possible meanings, none of which is obviously the “intended meaning,” so far as the reader is concerned.

## 4. EARLY ORAL TRADITION IN JOHN

In the second half of the twentieth century, C. H. Dodd may have made the clearest scholarly impact on the possibility of discovering a portrayal of the historical Jesus and the earliest of Christian traditions in John. In some ways, it is unfortunate that his earlier book, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953), was given more attention than his later work, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (1963). To be sure, his careful comparison of Synoptic and Johannine materials in the second book was not without its weaknesses. After all these years, however, it is still striking that Dodd imagined a lively oral tradition that fed *both the Synoptics and John*. As a matter of fact, in the introduction to *Historical Tradition*, Dodd conceives his work as part of “the revolt against ‘historicism’” and “the awakened interest in the witness of the gospels to Christian faith and worship” (1963, 1). Dodd thought his research demonstrated that the Fourth Gospel merited “serious consideration as a contribution to our knowledge of the historical facts concerning Jesus Christ” (1963, 423). He believed the tradition behind the Fourth Gospel showed evidence of contact with an Aramaic, Jewish-Christian tradition in a Jewish environment. He goes on to itemize how John supplements the Synoptics (e.g., a fuller account of a ministry in Southern Palestine) and how even the Fourth Evangelist’s distinctive theology is often framed by what seems to be traditional material. He rejects the Synoptic representations of Jesus as the norm for what is historical and warns against assuming that the non-Synoptic material in John is by definition “nonhistorical.” However, Dodd was appropriately cautious in trying to determine which sayings materials in John likely rooted in the historical Jesus.<sup>49</sup>

Dodd’s work was seriously criticized by scholars who thought he jumped too quickly from “early tradition” to Jesus, imagined the early tradition to be far simpler than is likely, and identified traditional material exclusively by means of a comparison of John and the Synoptics. His book was attacked from both sides: by those who thought he too easily identified Jesus material in the tradition and those who criticized him for not going farther in his quest for the historical Jesus in John (Kysar 1975, 61–64). Unfortunately, Johannine criticism has not yet made significant progress in discerning the shape of the oral tradition behind the Fourth Gospel, and whatever promise Dodd’s thesis might have had has so far gone unfulfilled.

This is not to say, however, that there has been no interest in the preliterate tradition behind John. Barnabas Lindars embraced many of Dodd’s findings and tried to locate specific passages that demonstrate an early tradition “parallel” to

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49. Dodd 1963, 423–32; see also 1953, 444–53.

Synoptic sources. Most importantly, he made a feasible proposal for the saying materials in John when he posited a homiletical origin for them.<sup>50</sup>

Raymond Brown's work is similar (1966–70, 1:xlvi–li). He insists that primitive oral tradition played a large role at the first stage of the Gospel's composition. However, he cautiously, but correctly, states that isolating the historical Jesus and earliest traditions from later materials with any degree of confidence is all but impossible. The Johannine farewell discourses were probably formed out of traditional sayings, which were first "preserved in various contexts" and then "woven into connected speech on a particular theme" (Brown 1966–70, 1:xlvi–xlix, 2:585).

In general, the problem has not been an unwillingness to acknowledge that the Fourth Gospel contains material originating with the historical Jesus and/or the very earliest Palestinian Christian tradition; the problem has been in developing a method for discriminating among the different "layers" of material in John. The features of Synoptic materials that made form criticism useful (e.g., forms found repeatedly in narratives such as healing stories) are generally (but not entirely) absent from John, in spite of Dodd's best efforts. If we are ever to "rehistoricize" John, we need studies in oral transmission in order to fashion a method of discerning preliterary features in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>51</sup> There is indication of a renewed interest, which might prove fruitful, in just such a use of form criticism in the study of the Fourth Gospel (see Moloney 2000b, 249).

If anything in current scholarship is comparable to Dodd's program in identifying oral traditions that link John and the Synoptics, it is the recent work of Paul N. Anderson, who has advanced a complex theory that claims the early Johannine oral tradition both influenced and was influenced by the preliterary traditions behind each of the Synoptic Gospels and Q. He calls it an "interfluent" series of relationships that were both formative and dialectical. In fairness to Anderson, he is still in the early stages of formulating and refining his interesting hypothesis. Thus far he finds evidence that John circulated in a first edition (ca. 80–85 C.E.) and later a final edition written after the Johannine Epistles (ca. 100 C.E.). So, John was the last of the four Gospels to be finalized, but that does not mean it was "derivative from" what Anderson calls "alien (non-Johannine) sources."<sup>52</sup> He finds numerous points of contact between John and each of the

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50. Lindars 1972, 51–56. See also Lindars 1971; Brown 1966–70, 1:275–80; and Borgen 1965.

51. See Joanna Dewey 1991, 239–52. See also the recent work by Antoinette Clark Wire 2002. One effort to study a peculiar form in John that might be traced back to an oral stage of the tradition is Tom Thatcher's work (2000). Looking for oral forms and language is a promising means of identifying preliterary fragments in John once we can decide what those forms and language are.

52. Anderson 2002a, 19. He regards Lindars' "the most convincing of all the theories of John's composition" (2002a, 28) and builds upon it his own two-edition theory of composi-

Synoptics, which provide him a basis for discerning the interrelationship of the Gospels in a preliterate form.<sup>53</sup> Because of the presence of “broad similarities,” on the one hand, and the absence of identical ones, on the other, Anderson contends that the contacts with the Markan tradition were first at the oral stage. These broad similarities suggest “traces of orality which were characteristic of the sorts of details preachers used in narrating their accounts of the ministry of Jesus.”<sup>54</sup>

Anderson contends, however, that the relationship of John and the Synoptics is more than a simple mutual influence; the Johannine tradition corrected as well as complemented at least two of the Synoptic traditions. With relation to Mark, “John’s narrative appears at times to provide an alternative presentation of events with *knowing intentionality*.” Moreover, John’s tradition suggests at least some “historical superiority” to the Markan traditions, and in dialogue with later Matthean ecclesial influence presents a narrative of Jesus’ ministry that poses “the original intentionality of Jesus for the emerging needs of the church.”<sup>55</sup> Anderson concludes his provocative essay, saying, “While John’s Gospel may have been finalized last, its tradition did not originate late, and much of it represents an authentic reflection on the ministry of Jesus and its ongoing implications.” The details of the Gospel describe a reality that is not the concoction of a writer of fiction.<sup>56</sup>

The scope of Anderson’s project and the creativity it attests are impressive. He endeavors to bring together many of the major issues in Johannine stud-

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tion. Anderson also calls John and Mark “the Bi-Optic Gospels” and identifies several stages of interfluency between the Second and Fourth Gospels and their traditions (2001a; 2001b). He then works with comparisons between John and each of the distinctive material in the L, M, and Q traditions and develops his inferences accordingly (2002a, 34–57). He sees the Johannine tradition as a formative source for Luke and Q, and dialectically engaged with the early Markan and later Matthean traditions.

53. I proposed that oral tradition provided the best way to account for the similarities and differences between John and the Synoptics and that the traditions influenced one another; however, I have never tried to garner evidence for such a view, in part because I do not know what sort of evidence would suffice (Kysar 1993, 12–13).

54. Anderson 2002a, 24–26, 43–48—esp. the graphic detail omitted by Matthew and Luke’s redactions of Mark. Later Anderson answers the question why he regards these contacts between John and Luke oral and not written with an example: “The Johannine-Lukan contacts seem to indicate traces of oral-aural influence rather than writing-reading influence.” For instance, Anderson supposes Luke tells a story of the anointing of Jesus’ feet rather than his head because the third Evangelist may have *heard* the name “Mary” in connection with this story and took it to refer to Mary Magdalene rather than Mary, the sister of Lazarus (Hofrichter 2002, 282).

55. Anderson 2002a, 23, emphasis added.

56. Anderson 2002a, 57. Anderson still accepts that at least some Johannine Christians were put out of the synagogue “either before or after” the Birkat Haminim, originating out of Jamnia (2002a, 30). Many scholars would now, however, contend that such a view is no longer viable due to recent historical and exegetical studies. See Reuven Kimelman 1981; Steven T. Katz 1984; Pieter W. van der Horst 1994; and most recently Adele Reinhartz 2001, 48–53.

ies and provide a comprehensive and coherent reconstruction of the traditions behind John. In doing so, he clearly hopes to reestablish the value of the Fourth Gospel for historical investigation. Any critical observations need to be preliminary, since Anderson intends to do much more. However, what is not clear at this stage is how he is able to interpret evidence that, at least in my view, is at best ambiguous (and subjective) in ways that produce the confidence he has in his theory. How does one determine “original intentionality” with any clarity? Can one ever really “prove” such theories as Anderson proposes?<sup>57</sup> In this kind of reconstruction what constitutes “empirical evidence?”<sup>58</sup> However much I admire his endeavor, it entails an enormous amount of speculation and conjecture. His hypothesis may indeed prove to be very valuable, but Anderson needs to acknowledge more directly the role of subjectivity in assessing the evidence he finds and analyzes, and the role of pure speculation. Still, the suggestion that the Synoptic and Johannine traditions touched and influenced one another makes a great deal of sense, and it is refreshing to find someone who contents that the Johannine tradition may have shaped some of the Synoptic traditions, not just the other way around!<sup>59</sup>

## 5. THE VALUE OF WRITTEN SOURCES

Until recently, the recovery of oral tradition in the Fourth Gospel has, to some degree at least, been replaced by efforts to discern and reconstruct the written sources the Evangelist might have used. Of course, the waves in the Johannine sea caused by Rudolf Bultmann’s source theory have carried many of us further out in that sea. As well as inspiring a renewed effort to find the written sources embedded in the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann’s theological interpretation of John moved scholarship away from a view of John as a historical source. Having declared that “we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus” (Bultmann 1958, 8), he assuredly was not going to find that Jesus in John! Indeed, Bultmann contributed mightily to our sense that non-Christian and non-Jewish influences shaped the community behind the Fourth Gospel.

Following in the wake of Bultmann’s influence, a number of source theories arose, especially those involving some sort of a signs source (Kysar 1975, 13–37). Indeed, it is still common today for commentators to mention the likelihood that

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57. See also my dialogue with Anderson on “intentionality” in the review of his 1996 book, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, in the first volume of the *Review of Biblical Literature*: Kysar 1999b and Anderson 1999b.

58. I take “empirical” in this context to mean a specific reality that makes possible the construction of a hypothesis, which in turn may be repeated by others and taken as a demonstrable truth statement about a matter.

59. For another example of a proposed influence of the Fourth Gospel on one of the Synoptics, see Matson 2001, who argues that Luke made use of a written version of John.

the Fourth Evangelist used a collection of Jesus' signs (Smith 1999, 28). For a short time, it seemed possible that these theories might converge on a consensus (Kysar 1973), but, alas, that dream was soon shattered. Still, a few of the theories for John's use of written sources (other than the Synoptics) have survived and continue to impact our study of this Gospel.

Like efforts to discern the Evangelist's use of oral sources, written source theories have universally failed to offer convincing criteria for identifying the presence of such sources in the Gospel. Bultmann's source theory<sup>60</sup> provided a starting point for methods by which one might separate sources from the work of the Evangelist. Two source theories have thus far survived the gale-force winds of criticism and continue to attract adherents, namely, those of Urban von Wahlde (1989) and Robert Fortna (1970; 1988). Both have meticulously developed standards of judgment for distinguishing materials supposedly taken from a document that preceded the Gospel. Von Wahlde's criteria include extensive use of peculiar literary features, especially terms, and Fortna's work is renowned for his attention to aporias. My own 1975 critical assessment of the methods of source criticism in the Fourth Gospel continues to express my view of the complex difficulties, which none of the source theories has entirely overcome (Kysar 1975, 33–37). Source theories are forced, for the most part, to make judgments that are too tenuous to support the weight they are asked to carry. The complex and inscrutable nature of both Johannine thought and literary style has limited the feasibility of any such endeavor.

Since our concern is with how, if at all, source theories might put us in touch with the earliest Christian tradition behind the Gospel, these theories are pertinent only if the sources can be dated early and/or be shown to contain earlier traditions. However, dating the hypothetical sources or their contents has proven to be as dubious as the criteria for source separation. Critics have tried to devise means of identifying source material within the Gospel, but are then unable to date the source with enough confidence for us to construct anything approaching a historical origin for the hypothetical source. For instance, despite all the efforts Fortna has expended on a "Signs Gospel" source, he has no means of assessing how early it was written or how primitive the tradition in it might be.<sup>61</sup> To be sure, he draws logical conclusions from the evidence he has and the history he reconstructs, but clear standards for assessing age are not to be found. To my knowledge, Fortna's most extensive discussion of dating is in his second book. He concludes that discussion by saying, "[w]e can thus imagine a dating in the 40s or

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60. Bultmann 1971; 1955b, 2:8–92. See also D. Moody Smith 1965.

61. One notable, but I fear unsuccessful, effort to produce evidence for glosses on the original Signs Gospel, is Sara C. Winter 2001.



possibly the 50s of the first century—roughly contemporary with Q.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, after listing the general characteristics of the material he identifies as coming from the source, von Wahlde (1989, 172–74) can suggest only an approximate date, which itself seems dependent on when one dates the Gospel. This is not to fault Fortna or von Wahlde, but only to point out how difficult it is to determine the date of proposed, hypothetical sources. Therefore, one has to ask whether source-critical theories actually aid the rehistoricizing of the Gospel of John in any way.<sup>63</sup>

We must conclude that, at least thus far, written source criticism has produced no solid basis for identifying material that might have originated with the historical Jesus or the earliest Christian tradition. Of course, the criteria I am requiring are hard to come by. While several criteria for determining the age of Synoptic passages have been developed,<sup>64</sup> they are at best tenuous and certainly speculative. Stanley E. Porter (2000) recently assessed the five most popular criteria for authenticity in the quest of the historical Jesus and successfully called into question the validity of each of these criteria. However, when Porter proposes his own new standards, they seem no more successful than the standard set of qualifications.<sup>65</sup> Even further, Luke Timothy Johnson (1996) questions the entire enterprise of the search for the historical Jesus, or even the earliest Christian tradition.

The possibility of finding firmer bases for identifying and dating source material more precisely is, I fear, not very likely. So we are left with a dehistoricized Gospel, the study of which does not easily yield up the history of its materials.

## 6. THE NEW CRITICISMS

As was the case with other scholarly movements in New Testament criticism, Johannine studies have been among the last to benefit from the new criticisms, more specifically, social-scientific and literary interpretations. John H. Elliott defines social-scientific criticism as “that phase of the exegetical task which

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62. Fortna 1988, 214–16. The evidence Fortna uses to arrive at this date appear to be these: the Signs Gospel was earlier than Mark because its passion story “represents a theological stage earlier than Mark’s” and because there is no indication in the source of the destruction of the temple “or even its possibility.” Moreover, the Signs Gospel arose in a place and time in which Christians were still comfortable with their Jewish identity. As interesting as these clues to the dating of the “Signs Gospel” are, all these bits of evidence are certainly susceptible to other interpretations; see also Fortna 1970, 225.

63. Fortna (2001, 202–03) explicitly declares that the wondrous acts attributed to Jesus in his proposed Signs Gospel are not historical or factual; see also Fortna 1970, 227.

64. Note for instance an expanded set of criteria for determining historicity by John P. Meier 1991, 1:167–84.

65. See also Paul N. Anderson 2000b, who presents the now-conventional criteria for discerning the historical Jesus.



analyzes the social and culture dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences" (1993, 7). For the most part, these methods have produced a number of interesting studies of the Johannine community, but without reference to the tradition behind that community.

Bruce Malina (1985) launched the social-scientific study of John in the direction of the Johannine community with his very important article on the language of the Gospel, and the major contributions of this method have followed suite.<sup>66</sup> The analysis in each case is of the community in a situation of antagonism with its culture, theories that are often built on some version of the Martyn-Brown hypothesis of the community's expulsion from the synagogue.<sup>67</sup> The effort, for the most part, is to produce a rich image of the social settings in which the authors wrote. As David Rensberger says of his research, "our primary object in studying this Gospel must remain the intention of John, not the intention of Jesus" (1988, 23).

As a consequence of this major focus of the social-scientific studies of John, the method has avoided any pretense of penetrating the text with the hope of discerning early Christian tradition. The method thrives on identifying social-cultural contexts for aspects of a narrative, but seldom (if ever) attempts to date such settings with any specificity. For instance, in their commentary on John, Malina and Rohrbaugh describe weddings in "antiquity" to elucidate the story of the wedding at Cana (2:1–12) and explain that Nathaniel's bewilderment at Philip's identification of Jesus as Messiah (1:46) was due to the fact that "people in antiquity were expected unfailingly to act in accord with their birth status."<sup>68</sup> While these are valuable insights into the text, they are not efforts to discern the history of the earliest Christian community or of Jesus. While we may be brought to an appreciation for the text as representative of the ancient Mediterranean world, we are no closer to any historical tradition behind the text. Social-scientific criticism is interested neither in dehistoricizing nor in rehistoricizing John.

The new *literary criticism* influenced Johannine studies more comprehensively only after the publications of Birger Olsson (1974) and R. Alan Culpepper (1983). This new appreciation for the literary qualities of John enabled us to value more highly some of the earlier studies that were really of a literary nature.<sup>69</sup>

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66. For a study that utilizes the work of Mary Douglas, see Jerome H. Neyrey 1988.

67. Most clearly, David Rensberger 1988, 22.

68. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh 1998, 70 and 55.

69. E.g., David W. Wead 1970. See further, Robert Kysar 1977, 366. Early literary criticism produced Gail O'Day's work on revelation in the Fourth Gospel (1986) and Paul D. Duke's 1985 book, each of which showed the importance of irony in the Gospel.

Since then literary criticisms of various types have risen to prominence in Johannine studies.<sup>70</sup>

What are the implications of this new literary criticism for the question of dehistoricization? Few literary critics will say that they intend to eliminate any fragment of historical value the Fourth Gospel might have. Still, the nature of this new criticism seriously impacts the present topic. In fact, literary criticism may prove to be the strongest force in biblical criticism today and in the near future to minimize further (if only by lack of interest in the question) the value of the Fourth Gospel as a resource for the historical Jesus or the earliest Christian tradition.

This statement may prove to be true because of the very nature of literary criticisms. To use the now old (and tired?) distinction, historical critics looked through the window of the text to see the historical context in which it was written and to which it refers; literary criticism, on the other hand, views the text as a "mirror" in which the interpreter sees herself or himself and constructs the text's meaning. To oversimplify the issue, since the Enlightenment historical-critical methods have contended that grasping a text's meaning necessitates knowing (as best we can) what its author intended by it when—out of a specific historical context—he or she wrote the text. In contrast, many of the new literary critics now hold that authorial intention is both unknowable and unimportant. The text *means* what it does, either on its own or in dialogue with the contemporary interpreter, but without recourse to its origin. Meaning occurs in front of the text, not in the discovery of its original intended meaning or exclusively in the discernment of historical context out of which the document originated.

Hence, literary criticism does not depend upon the interpreter's historical knowledge, and historical investigations (while not entirely irrelevant) no longer matter as they once did. Some have claimed that the newer criticisms are dethroning history in the wave of postmodernist thought. Be that as it may, in their pure forms the newer literary criticisms have absolutely no interest in using the Fourth Gospel as a source, neither for Jesus' history nor for the history of the very first Christian tradition. So, behold, within some literary approaches John is totally dehistoricized, but not necessarily spiritualized. Once again the focus is on a later history in the life of the community.

One simple example of how this new criticism contributes to the dehistoricization of John may prove helpful. The three mentions of Passover seasons in this Gospel (2:23; 6:4; and 12:1) supply sufficient evidence for some historically oriented interpreters to conclude that the Evangelist believed Jesus' ministry spanned three years (Meier 1991, 1:403–6). In contrast, literary critics quickly point out

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70. Compare, for instance, the two issues of *Interpretation* devoted entirely to the Fourth Gospel: vols. 31 (1977) and 49 (1995); the difference in the articles in these two issues exemplifies some of what has been happening in Johannine studies recently.

that those three references are to *narrative time*, not necessarily history (e.g., Culpepper 1983, 70). Discerning what the text says helps us understand the text and nothing more, in particular not the historical situation behind the text.<sup>71</sup>

A good number of critics now use historical and literary criticisms in tandem,<sup>72</sup> and with time more may do so. Until then, one would have to say that among the more radical literary critics, historical knowledge is no longer a reason for reading John. It is fairly safe to conjecture that the future of Johannine studies resides in the rhetorical, literary, narrative criticisms, and that historical concerns may increasingly become a thing of the past.<sup>73</sup>

## 7. WHAT IS HISTORY?

To summarize the discussion to this point, the contemporary movements in Johannine studies from the mid-twentieth century to the present are not consistent in their results with regard to the historical value of the Fourth Gospel. In some cases, these movements enable some to advance a “new view” of the Gospel in terms of its preservation of the historical Jesus and an early Christian tradition regarding him. However, the task of developing criteria for distinguishing between history and interpretation or among stages of history may be stalled.<sup>74</sup> Until such criteria can be advanced and agreed to (if ever!), we have little chance to reopen the question of the historical value of John.<sup>75</sup> Finally, however impossible it may seem, I believe the task of reclaiming John as a source of history requires more cautious and disciplined historical research, assisted by clear controls on human imagination and speculation. On the one hand, history is only done by virtue of imagination. Only with imagination can we glue pieces of evidence together to construct a “picture of the past.” On the other hand, flights of fancy gain us nothing, and speculation given full rein only impedes scholarly efforts. What controls are possible for our efforts at historical reconstructions?

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71. See Edgar V. McKnight 1988, and more recently the Bible and Culture Collective, McKnight 1995.

72. E.g., Culpepper 1998 and O'Day 1995.

73. The “literary approaches” in two volumes of *What Is John?* edited by Fernando Segovia (1996, 5–104; 1998, 5–76) typify the concerns of Johannine literary critics. See also the collection of essays in *Semeia* 53 (1991), edited by Culpepper and Segovia.

74. Craig L. Blomberg (2001, 79) is more optimistic and believes that two criteria for authenticity are still valuable.

75. Tom Thatcher (2001a, 356) properly concludes that there are two tasks facing such an investigation: “to describe more precisely how FE understood the relationship between Jesus, Jesus tradition, the Paraclete, and his own ‘witness.’ In the second place, questions concerning the relationship between the Johannine Jesus and the historical Jesus have not been, and cannot be, answered by the conventional ‘criteria of authenticity’ on which contemporary Jesus research is based.”

However, more important is the question: What is history? Some scholars, both within and beyond the arena of biblical interpretation, are challenging and even dismantling the whole enterprise of historical studies. Some who accept the title postmodernists propose that history, as it has been conceived in modernism, is no longer possible. A. K. M. Adam has shown how integral history is to the fabric of modernity and how that fabric is unraveling.<sup>76</sup> According to Adam and others, we can no longer believe there is a “past” that has some sort of ontological reality and can be known by means of research tools.<sup>77</sup> Gary Phillips argues that postmodernism deconstructs the “totalizing, transparent and sense-making character of modern metanarrative” without entirely renouncing “historical narrative or structure.” What is left, however, is only the examination of the consequences of our reading and exegetical practices.<sup>78</sup>

For Fred Burnett the problem of history is both epistemological and ontological. He points out that, as a discipline, history has taken a “linguistic turn.” It no longer claims to discover the past but only to study the texts *about* the past:

“[H]istory” is defined as an organized re-presentation of textual traces from the past. “History” is the practice of representing texts that have themselves already re-presented the past. The *intertextuality* of the past is the primary referent of the historian’s work, not an object known as the “past itself.”

What we think of as “history” is always the result of other histories, *all of which are fictional narratives saturated with the ideological stances of the authors.*<sup>79</sup> Earlier Burnett put it even more pointedly: “the historian’s discourse is a sign that refers to itself.” Furthermore, he concludes that one way to understand postmodern history is to say the historian’s task is “that of writing realistic fiction which mediates *narrative truth*,” which is to be evaluated in “aesthetic terms.”<sup>80</sup>

Since the past is unknowable, some hold that the construction of what postmodernists call meta-narratives is impossible, unnecessary, and finally deceptive (Adam 1995b, 16–23). Instead of these large, sweeping, universal stories, “little narratives” may serve as a means of discourse among those concerned with texts related to the past, but these small stories have absolutely no ontological reference. They are expressions of individuals’ stories and enrich the symbolic world

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76. This is Adam’s basic argument throughout *Making Sense of New Testament Theology* (1995a). Such an unraveling might have begun when some questioned the human capacity “to transcend the limits of one’s own perspective,” see Harvey 1966, 240.

77. Stephen D. Moore (1989, 130) speaks of this as “a shift from diachronic to synchronic methods,” which is part of a larger shift in paradigms for biblical studies.

78. Gary A. Phillips (1990, 28, 33) seeks to reclaim history and text from a postmodern perspective.

79. See Fred W. Burnett 2000, 106–12; quotation, 107.

80. Burnett 1990, 64 (emphasis original).

in which we live. The biblical narratives themselves are such “little stories,” which in turn invite those of us who are interpreters to construct our own little stories about ourselves (Gina Henz-Piazza 2000, 164–66). Consequently, for knowing the past as some objective reality, neither the biblical documents themselves nor our efforts to understand them can be successful.

This reformulation of the historical enterprise is also found in the amorphous and deliberately amethodological movement known as “the new historicism.” Here is not the place for a discussion of this broad literary development. It suffices to say that the intertextual historical task never pretends to discover the past but only to investigate fragments of other texts in ways that *merge the past and the present*. (Is this similar to Bultmann’s view?) Hence, the study of the development of the Fourth Gospel is as much a study of the investigators’ own ideologies as it is a search for what the Gospel tells us about the past. In its claim that history always investigates the texts of the investigators, the new historicism marks the end of what we have known as the objective and scientific recreation of the past (Henz-Piazza 2002).

If such a critique of history is sound, even only in part, and if it is indeed the new direction historical studies are to take, where does that leave those who might seek to “rehistoricize” John? It would seem we are left with an entirely different sort of discipline than we might have assumed to be the goal of those who might challenge the dehistoricizing of John. To practice this new understanding of history, rehistoricizing the Fourth Gospel means that we each go about our task of reading and interpreting its maze of “little stories” in order to contribute our own fictive stories (which are really about ourselves, not some distant past) to the world of interpretative discourse. Could we—should we—abandon the effort to find fragments of the historical Jesus and the earliest Christian tradition embedded in John in favor of individual fictional and imaginative stories? Can we simply go on doing our historical research as if the entire concept of history remains what it was when I was in graduate school?<sup>81</sup>

Jeffrey L. Staley provides us one model for the role of historical research in Johannine studies in his contribution to *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (2001). While we cannot determine the Gospel’s historical situation, we can, Staley suggests, discern its “rhetorical situation.” No theory of this Gospel’s origin can become authoritative, since all such theories are laden with the scholars’ own ideolo-

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81. Interestingly, near the start of the twentieth century, Brook Foss Westcott (1908, cxii) wrote, “There is undoubtedly at present a strong feeling in favour of realistic, external, history; but it may reasonably be questioned whether this fashion of opinion will be permanent, and it is obviously beset by many perils. Realistic history often treats only of the dress and not of the living frame, and it can never go beyond the outward circumstances of an organisation which is inspired by one vital power.”

gies. Historical reconstructions are likely always to serve some set of interests. As Staley points out,

a postmodern approach to questions of the Johannine historical situation is not necessarily ahistorical or uninterested in issues relating the community's origins and development.... However, what a postmodern approach does bring to the conversation is a healthy respect for the way in which ideological concerns get translated into historical hypotheses, which sometimes in turn become consensus views. (2001, 56–57; see also Staley 1996)

I, for one, need greater clarity about how Staley thinks Johannine scholarship should continue, given his view of history.

This postmodern understanding of history does, however, suggest several “moderate” considerations for the question of historical research pertaining to the Fourth Gospel. First, it might be that we should explore the question of history strictly in terms of *perspective*. Assuming that every scholar comes to historical inquiry with a unique perspective and that our “little interpretative stories” are filled with our own ideology, might we not speak of a multitude of historical perspectives without having to make a claim for the truthfulness of one and the error of all the others? We would have to suspend all efforts to find evidence that proves this or that hypothesis.<sup>82</sup> In this way, different “perspectival histories” would occasion dialogue among us over the important issues. Moreover, might the category of perspective provide a somewhat different construal of the question of the relationship among history, kerygma, and faith?<sup>83</sup> The Fourth Evangelist’s perspective on the past is itself an imaginative narrative that differs from those of the other three Evangelists, but is no less “historical” (in a postmodern sense). Moreover, my own fictive narrative of the Gospel’s composition is no more or no less subjective than another’s. Clearly, however, this would mean that we take up an entirely different task than the one we usually call historical.

The second interesting lead brought to mind by postmodernists’ revisions of historical research has to do with the relationship between the spiritual and the historical. Settling on a single definition of “spiritual” is nearly impossible, but perhaps postmodernist history is a kind of spiritual enterprise in itself. If writing “little stories” in our interpretative efforts is the best we can do, what is the

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82. In 1896 Martin Kähler declared, “The cardinal virtue of genuine historical research is modesty” (47). More recently J. Louis Martyn (1978, 92) proposed that it would be valuable for historians, upon rising each day, to stand before a mirror and say “three times slowly and with emphasis, ‘I do not know.’”

83. Edward Thomas Ramsdell (1950) sought to construct a whole theology on the basis of perspectivalism, but his efforts were cut short by his untimely death. Like Van Harvey (1966, 259 and 205), I am using “perspective” to designate an interpretative standpoint, but I do not find very helpful his distinction between “hard” and “soft” perspective as degrees of relativism.

relationship between those stories and spirituality? If our historical enterprises are laced with our own ideologies and personalities, are they not in themselves a form of spiritual exercise? It may be that the new historicism closes what we have always thought to be the gap between “historical” and “spiritual,” a gap that proves to be illusory.

### CONCLUSION

New historical investigations that take perspective seriously and deny a sharp separation between writing “little histories” and spirituality allow for and affirm the impact of the ideological investments and social location of interpreters. However, if some such view as this were to become our working posture toward the Fourth Gospel, it would necessitate surrendering the possibility that any of us (including Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) will ever get the past exactly right or discover “what really happened.” Indeed, “what really happened” is a creation of our imaginations. To embrace the multiplicities of interpretative perspectives would either greatly facilitate the work of the John, Jesus, and History project or utterly demolish it. For that reason alone, we cannot afford to ignore the issue.





## THE “SPIRITUAL GOSPEL”: HOW JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN WRITES HISTORY

*Marianne Meye Thompson*

Once again Bob Kysar has given us a masterful survey of issues, this time answering the question, “Why isn’t John taken seriously as a possible source for Jesus, or even as the product of a vibrant Jesus tradition?” Bob’s survey suggests that the answer to that question would be something like this: “Because John’s Gospel is not like the Synoptic Gospels; and where it differs, we see that John writes in essentially a different key, or perhaps even genre, doing theology rather than history.” In such a definition, history typically means “a record of factual events” or “something we can verify,” whereas theology means something like “interpretations related tangentially, if at all, to history.” Thus to see John as a source for Jesus would be to find in John factual events, where “facts” are the things Jesus really did and things Jesus really said or, as one philosopher of history defines facts, “low-level interpretive entities unlikely for the moment to be contested” (Haskell 1998, 157). It is worth asking at the outset what the value of even a positive outcome of such a quest might be.

In his survey, Bob asks whether John’s method might not frustrate a “purely historical” approach.<sup>1</sup> After all, the other Gospels record τὰ σωματικά, whereas John is a “spiritual Gospel.” Typically this statement is interpreted to mean something like “the Synoptic Gospels report facts; John interprets them,” or “the Synoptics record history; John theologizes.” But whatever Clement meant in calling John “a spiritual Gospel,” it is doubtful that he meant to contrast “facts,” in the modern sense, and “interpretation.” To affirm that a Gospel is “spiritual” would indicate something about the *kind* of truth it conveys and the *way* that truth is known. That is to say, a “spiritual” Gospel gives the inner meaning of an event or reality, and hence its truth must be spiritually discerned. Clement surely did not mean that John was *uninterested* in giving us Jesus “as he really was”; rather, he

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1. As Maurice Wiles once put it, “[The Fourth Gospel] is of such a nature that it seems to reveal its secrets not so much to the skilful probings of the analyst as to a certain intuitive sympathy of understanding” (1960, 1).

would have meant that the truth about Jesus, as given in the Gospel of John, must be spiritually discerned. But there is no way of getting into the “spiritual” meaning of history through purely historical methods. Traditional historical inquiry, because it is empiricist, tends also to be minimalist. Historical study, even if it can yield a treasure trove of “low level interpretive realities,” cannot get us Jesus “*wie er eigentlich gewesen ist*,” as he really was, since as Edwyn Hoskyns puts it, John’s interests lies in showing that “what Jesus is to the faith of the true Christian believer, he was in the flesh” (1947, 35).

Put differently, John and its early interpreters apparently thought that interpretation disclosed rather than veiled the meaning of history. We take just the opposite viewpoint today, and in that difference lies much of the reason for the “dehistoricization of John.” Typically, our modern view runs something like this: if an item in John stands in the service of his theological or interpretative agenda, then its historicity is called into question. That is a very strange way to imagine how theology works, and perhaps it could only have been thought of by people actually *not* doing theology. Theologians draw on a range of materials in their work, including factual data, philosophical materials, contextual influences, their own viewpoints and commitments, their knowledge and understanding of events, and so on. And that is exactly what John does. But historians are no less influenced by the same factors, as they seek to recount, interpret, and present the past or, better, those few incidents in the vast ocean of the “past” that they seek to interpret and present in a historical account. Here New Testament studies might be stimulated and helped by the work that is being done today in the philosophy of history, work that tries to escape the polarization between purely “positivist” and purely “perspectival” accounts of history.<sup>2</sup> Attention to such work might not only help us to break out of our rather ingrown discussions, but it might also help us to conceive of other “models” for thinking of doing “history.”

More specifically, however, in order to reopen the question of John as a source for studying the Jesus of history, a first step would be to reflect upon the diverse ways in which John goes about the task of *doing* “history” and “theology.” The more sweeping the rubrics, such as “spiritual Gospel” or “theological account,” the less likely they are to be helpful in actually explaining what John is up to. While explaining “what John is up to” might get us only to John, and not to Jesus, it is an important first step in understanding how John presents Jesus to his readers. One of the problems we face is that the paths to answering the question of “what John is up to” are rather well-worn and deeply rutted, and we tend

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2. My thanks to Joel B. Green, who has alerted me to contemporary discussion in this area: Michel de Certeau 1988; Paul Veyne 1984; Hayden White 1987 (and more recently 1999); Brian Stock 1990; Albert Cook 1988; and David Lowenthal 1985. The discipline is helpfully surveyed in Ernst Breisach 1994.

to traverse them repeatedly. In order to get out of the ruts, I think we need to be willing to set aside for a while the so-called "assured results of criticism." These "assured results" include current construals of John's audience and purpose, the nature of his theological creativity, and the very way in which we understand John's interest in the Jesus of history. I can only make some brief comments and offer an example or two with respect to each point; and I offer these reflections as genuine questions for mutual consideration.

First, let us consider John's audience and purpose. We speak of the Johannine community, in-group language, sectarian mentality, and two levels of meaning as though these were axioms rather than speculative hypotheses about the Gospel. I suggest that we should reopen these questions, and take John at face value, not as a coded account of his community—its theological beliefs and struggles—but rather as a presentation of Jesus to an unspecified group of readers. As the historical studies of scholars such as Dodd, Barrett, and others have shown us, the Gospel can be read against many contexts. In fact, John's use of a limited number of themes, including life, water, light, bread, and temple, that can be documented in contemporary Jewish literature and tradition but have a simple universal appeal as well, still rightly raises the question whether John is indeed a Gospel written for a much wider audience than the current consensus has it. If we do not view John as first and foremost giving us information about his own community, perhaps we can refocus our attention on the way in which John gives us information about Jesus.

Second, John's method of theological interpretation is extremely varied, and I doubt that we can simply meander through the Gospel plucking the obvious historical fruit from the theological tree. I give three short examples of where John's so-called theological interests prompt us to reconsider the question of whether John's theology might not also tell us something about Jesus. First, although it is sometimes said that there is no "messianic secret" in John, in many ways this is true only of the first chapter. Moreover, the following data should be noted: in John, only Jesus uses the term Son of Man as a positive designation for himself, and he does not use the term "Messiah," except to acknowledge to the Samaritan woman, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (John 4:26). Those who use "Messiah" are the crowds and his followers, just as in the Synoptics. Similarly, in chapter 10, when asked to plainly reveal whether he is the Messiah, he does not do so. And unlike the Synoptics, he is not asked at the trial, "Are you the Messiah?" If Jesus' identity is openly proclaimed, his messianic status is not, and there is a genuine messianic secret in the Fourth Gospel. It is the possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah that stirs up disciples, the crowds, and the authorities. This is part of John's narrative. As John A. T. Robinson once put it, Messiah "is the category which controls [John's] Christology in the body of the Gospel" (1970, 198). But this is also an instance of where John's theological narrative demonstrates some significant reticence in recasting the traditions that he has and that cannot be interpreted easily as reflecting only debates between later "communities."

Or take the account of the temple cleansing. Clearly in John this incident is given a postresurrection interpretation, since the body of Jesus is taken to be a temple that shall be destroyed and rebuilt. Although a later paper will dispute his interpretation, E. P. Sanders (1985, 75, 87) argued that Jesus' expectation of the destruction of the temple was linked to an expectation of a new temple and the arrival of a new age and that this expectation was often linked with the restoration of Israel and even with the Davidic king. John gives us a postresurrection interpretation of the account of the action in the temple; but it is the only one that overtly refers to the destruction and rebuilding of a temple. Moreover, John has placed it between other accounts that signal the arrival of the new age (the changing of the water to wine, the accounts of Nicodemus, and the encounter with the Samaritan woman). The point is not necessarily that John's chronology is "correct" here, because this seems to me to be the less important point. Rather, the point is that it is John's *theological* interpretation that reflects contemporary expectation of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple. This does not necessarily put us directly in touch with Jesus' intention, but it ought to cause us to ask whether John's theological perspective can serve a positive role in that quest.

Similarly, the death of Jesus is said to be like a good shepherd's gathering his sheep; it is the death of the one for the many, akin to the seed that dies so that it will not remain alone. Here is the Johannine theology of Jesus' death in a nutshell, but in what sense does the fact that it is theological interpretation rule out its "historical" character? If "not historical" means "Jesus did not say these things at a particular time and place," I doubt that there will ever be a way to prove or disprove this. It is, however, worthy of note that the Johannine view of Jesus' death is scarcely a full-blown interpretation of a sacrificial atonement, and it actually fits well with the view that Jesus' aim was the eschatological restoration of Israel, the regathering of the children of God scattered abroad. John's account of the reasons for Jesus' death reflects this motif as well and, even though it bears a distinctly Johannine stamp, puts us in touch with an early, not late, tradition about it.

A quick comment, then, about John's overall view of the Jesus of history. It is sometimes claimed that John has little or no interest in the "Jesus of history" but writes a "symbolic" account of some sort, loosely attached to fact, history, or the past. The view that John thinks of "hearing" as a mode of knowing that is superior to "seeing" fits quite well with this understanding of John's relative lack of interest in the Jesus of history. But if we were to reconsider the positive value that John places on "seeing," it might lead us to reconsider the value that John placed on the Jesus of history. After all, John does not write, "We *heard* of his glory," but "we have *seen* his glory." And even though John, like the other Gospels, quotes Isa 6:9–10 as a prophecy of unbelief, he eliminates the references to hearing, limiting the quotation to the failure to see, and linking it with the signs. True, John thought that Jesus' significance could not be grasped *solely* by "sight," but he surely did not think that genuine "insight" was to be obtained by denying or ignoring the realities of the earthly life of Jesus.

Finally, a quotation:

Jesus' case—briefly put, that he was God's spokesman, knew what his next major action in Israel's history would be, and could specify who would be in the kingdom—put him equally obviously against any reasonable interpretation of the scripture. If we give full weight to Jesus' extraordinary statements about the kingdom and about the role of his disciples—and thus, by implication, about himself—we have no trouble seeing that his claims were truly offensive.... [E]xegesis indicates that there were *specific* issues at stake between Jesus and the Jewish hierarchy, and that the specific issues revolved around a *basic question*: who spoke for God?

This, of course, was written by E. P. Sanders (1985, 280–81). I have often thought that no better summary could be given of the heart of the Gospel of John than this one.



# THE DE-JOHANNIFICATION OF JESUS: THE REVISIONIST CONTRIBUTION OF SOME NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN SCHOLARSHIP

*Jack Verheyden*

During the nineteenth century the discussion of the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel centered around the issue of its authorship by an apostle, John the Son of Zebedee. This had been the accepted view of the Christian tradition and, consequently, I will designate this orientation as the traditional one in what follows. Those who oppose this view I will refer to as adherents of the revisionist position, and this takes various forms. Whatever the case, though, the challenging of John's historicity and apostolic origin has had as its result, if not its goal, the de-Johannification of Jesus. Foundational in that development have been several nineteenth-century works of momentous impact.

Apparently the first rejecter of the traditional position was not German but an Englishman, Edward Evanson, who in 1792 wrote *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists*. In the initial decade of the nineteenth century in German-language theology a few publications appeared that rejected the traditional view but seemed to have little consequence. In 1820, however, this changed with a book published in Latin by Karl Bretschneider with an extended title beginning *Probabilia*, or "Probability," concerning the origin of the Gospel of John offered for the judgment of the learned. Neither before nor after did this author engage in any wild or daring projects, and he was prudent in sending his book forth in Latin so that only "the learned" could read it.

Bretschneider altered the discussion because his whole book was devoted to the Johannine question about the Gospel and Letters of that name, and his judgment was a thorough one against the traditional position. So he states:

It is accordingly quite impossible that both the Jesus of the first three Gospels and that of the Fourth can at the same time be historically true, since there is the greatest difference between them, not only in the manner of discourse but also in the argumentation and the behavior of the two; it is also quite incredible that the first evangelists invented Jesus' practices, teachings and method of instruction;

but it is quite believable that the author of the Fourth Gospel could have created his Jesus. (cited in Kümmel 1972, 85–86)

The principle stated in the first half of this quotation (through “behavior of the two”) on the matter that the Synoptics and John exclude each other in most respects concerning the history of Jesus is one that is held and applied again and again throughout the nineteenth century.

There are three structural aspects to the rejection by Bretschneider and others after him of the traditional position. These are: (1) that the author of the Gospel is John, the son of Zebedee; (2) that the Gospel comes from an eyewitness; and (3) that it provides authentic historical reports of what Jesus said and certain events of his life. Because of his exclusionary principle in respect to the third point vis-à-vis the Synoptics, Bretschneider rejects the first two; the traditional position assumes that by affirming the first point, it has also settled the latter two. He proposes a hypothetical scenario to underscore what he thinks is the situation (cf. Strauss 1865, 116–17). Suppose that the Gospel of John by some accident had remained unknown for the last eighteen hundred years and was then discovered only in our own time in the Middle East. Then virtually everyone would think that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is quite a different person with a different message than the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and that it is impossible that both these pictures of the same person and what he had to say can be true. The only reason that most people do not clearly see this is because of a long-rooted prejudice that the tradition has provided by means of the apostolic origin of John.

Bretschneider is most concerned with the difference between what Jesus has to say in John as contrasted with the Synoptics. The first three Gospels show us Jesus as a teacher of the people who combated the false living he saw in them with deeper piety and uncompromising morality. He opposed a Pharisaic spirit of exterior observance, attempted to foster a purity of mind and a love towards one's fellows, proclaimed a fulfillment of God's kingdom, and was personally compassionate to those in need. Instead of such language involving the fear of God and righteousness, the Fourth Gospel replaces this practical and popular teacher with a subtle metaphysician whose speeches expand ever and again on the subject of the higher dignity of his own person—reflecting not the Jewish idea of the Messiah but rather the Alexandrian doctrine of the Logos. Jesus' mode of expression is so obscure and mystical, his speeches so cold, artificial, and full of repetitions, his manner so abrasive that it might seem his intention was not to gather people but to repel them from him!

Faced with these irreconcilable representations, a historical choice is forced: either the Synoptics or John. Bretschneider thinks that the probability (hence the title of his book) of being authentically historical resides with the Synoptics. Clearly their representations fit the circumstances of the time; the other Gospel is often fictitious. Bretschneider adds to these critiques discussions of incorrect



accounts of localities in John, which indicate the author was not even an inhabitant of Palestine but a philosophically educated Gentile, probably from the vicinity of Alexandria in Egypt.

Bretschneider's book set off considerable discussion among those theologians willing to work through his Latin, and after a few years of enduring a spate of objections that this intellectual interchange brought forth, he began to take back aspects of his thoroughgoing revisionist position. He said that his observations were made so that they might be refuted and that he had been instructed by the discussion. Indeed, if he erred, it is fitting that the truth prevail and his views in the book be abandoned.

Nevertheless, the horse was now out of the barn and was available to be ridden by someone else. In this scene, the rider was David Friedrich Strauss, who in 1835 (translated in 1846) published one of the great monuments in the history of biblical criticism, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Strauss was quite a young man at that time, only twenty-seven years old, when he produced the nearly fifteen hundred pages of the original edition. The center of this work is Strauss's dialectical resolution of the contradictions of the orthodox supernaturalistic interpretation of the New Testament Gospels, on the one hand, and the rationalist reconstruction of the same texts, on the other.

Strauss's procedure is to move from text to text, line by line, through the Gospels, comparing the different writings when they portray the same event. His patience seems endless, and the result is an exhaustive (and for many readers an *exhausting*) examination. With respect to the Gospel of John, Strauss takes over and approves much of what Bretschneider said in the *Probabilia* with this important difference: he does not draw together an overall picture of Jesus according to the Synoptics and/or John in the way that Bretschneider had emphasized, as indicated above. Strauss stays with his line-by-line analysis, and his thoroughness of inspection goes beyond Bretschneider in accentuating the unhistorical in the Fourth Gospel.

Like Bretschneider, Strauss puts forward an emphasis on the speaking/teaching style of Jesus according to John and whether that feature is reliably represented. The constant method of the Fourth Evangelist in describing the conversations of Jesus is to make the interlocutors understand literally what Jesus intended figuratively, or symbolically (Strauss 1972, 368). This method is used pervasively in John, whether Jesus is speaking with an uneducated woman of Samaria or the most studious and intellectually prepared Pharisee. The Evangelist makes no adjustment in his manner of communication, exposing the overburdening of weak faculties with enigma upon enigma. In the first three Gospels, however, Jesus pursues an entirely different course. We must suppose the writer of the Fourth Gospel thought that, by heightening the contrast between the wisdom of Jesus and the listeners, who put unintelligent questions even on the most elementary doctrine, the wondrous nature of the incarnate Logos in relation to them would be underscored by the contrast.

The discourse of Jesus in John is also full of dogmatic ideas. Jesus claims that "I and the Father are one" (10:30) and that "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him the authority to execute judgment" (5:26). In fact, it is not unusual for it to become difficult for the reader to distinguish between that which is attributed to Jesus and that which is the writer's own statements. John 5:19–29 illustrates this point clearly, as the text seems to vary indistinguishably between the Evangelist and Jesus. This is also the case in this Gospel's account of John the Baptist; in 3:25–36 John begins speaking, but there is never any demarcation to it. "Grammatically, the Baptist continues to speak from v. 31 forward, and yet historically, it is impossible that he should have uttered the sequel" (Strauss 1972, 225). The Baptist thus becomes doctrinally indistinct both from Jesus and the Evangelist. Strauss therefore insists "that the Fourth Evangelist transforms the Baptist into a totally different character from that in which he appears in the Synoptic gospels and in Josephus; out of a practical preacher he makes a speculative christologist; out of a hard and unbending nature, a yielding and self-renunciating one" (227).

It was common in Strauss's day and before to say that John's discourses bore a peculiar stamp of truth and credibility, but Strauss declares this is highly improbable! A further "attack point" in his criticism is the contrast in the form of Jesus' speech between the kind of sayings and parables, either isolated or strung together, in the Synoptic Gospels, over and against the long expositions found in John. Appeals to the memory of an ancient man are unconvincing to Strauss, as such disquisitions would be the most difficult to retain and reproduce with accuracy. They would have to be reduced to writing at the moment of their delivery; otherwise, their faithful reproduction would have to be abandoned. Some defenders of John's historical reliability have recognized this point, so H. E. G. Paulus and Bertholdt both opine that there were note takers present, recording the speeches of Jesus in Aramaic shorthand (Strauss 1972, 381)! Between the lines, the reader of Strauss's pages can nearly apprehend his derisive laughter at such an explanation. For him it demonstrates the unhistorical lengths that the traditional view will grope after in attempting to defend the credibility of the Gospel of John.

In the main, Strauss says that he agrees with the author of the *Probabilia* that the discourses of Jesus are "free inventions of the fourth evangelist" (385). But the events of Jesus' public life also are subject to this same treatment. Guided by the author's dogmatic interest, many of these "are fictitious rather than real" (391). The encounter with the woman of Samaria, the continual attempt by the Jews to kill Jesus, his passing through the ranks of his adversaries without their being able to lay hands on him, and the story of Lazarus in its entirety—not just the mythical revivification—are fictions. The latter story, the most extreme of all Jesus' miracles, was public and would have been widely known (including the traditions for the Synoptics) if it indeed had happened. The suggestion that John had a separate, unknown tradition simply "will not wash" when it comes to this account (487–88).

In the New Testament, James the son of Zebedee is lifted up as one of the most prominent of the chosen Twelve, sharing with Peter and his brother John an apparent special closeness to Jesus. Indeed, James is usually mentioned after Peter and then is followed by John as his brother. Strauss says James was martyred at an early time and had comparatively little chance for a higher standing that would be influenced by developments after the crucifixion and resurrection. Rather, this standing comes from what is said about him in the Gospels. Strauss remarks that it seems strange for the Gospels highlighting James the son of Zebedee to be Matthew, Mark, and Luke—but not John. In the Gospel of John, James is not even explicitly mentioned by the author, who is alleged by the traditionalists to be the *other* son of Zebedee! It is hardly probable that the real John would so unbecomingly neglect the well-founded claims of his brother to special notice. This is another indication of a later, Hellenistic author, whose tradition through the passage of time had lost track of the early martyr (328–30).

After a virtually unparalleled deluge of attacks upon Strauss because of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, he could see his vocational expectations of a life as a university professor disappearing into the flames of the conflagration. Consequently, in 1838 he published a third edition of the book that toned down and revised some of his more inciting sections. He also “pulled a Bretschneider” and halfway took back his position on John, now finding more historical value there than he once had. After the edition came out, he received a letter from his former teacher, both at Tübingen and at a preparatory school prior to university, Ferdinand Christian Baur. Baur told him he thought Strauss’s revision of his opinion on John was a mistake and that the Gospel is fundamentally unhistorical. So, when Strauss lost his invited professorship in Zurich in 1839, he bitterly produced a fourth edition in 1840 that basically restored his work to the first two editions, and his positive employment of John was excised. This is the one that was translated by Mary Ann Evans (using the pseudonym “George Eliot”) in 1846.

The third phase for discussion is the influence of Baur, himself, and the group of writers that he headed known as “the Tübingen School.” This time, on John, there will be no taking it back! It is unclear whether Strauss was considered a member of this school or not. They all had in common that they were students of Baur, and their stand of thoroughgoing revisionism on the Fourth Gospel was their most famous insignia. In this respect, then, Strauss fits in. On the other hand, where all the rest of the school’s representatives approached the New Testament as both reflecting and addressing the dynamics of the life of the early church, an emphasis they received from Baur, Strauss was not interested in that venture. Rather, it was the myth-producing mentality of the prescientific ancient world that took his attention for this provided a key to the actual history behind the Gospels that would diverge from the text.

Baur was a holistic thinker. As a result, he was interested in a New Testament book for the role it played in the sweep of the initial centuries of Christianity: its place in the broad panorama. He made many errors in specifics, but in my

opinion he was the most influential German New Testament scholar of the nineteenth century, and in respect to our topic, John, there is no question but that the Tübingen School was the center of discussion. It became common to dismiss Baur in Britain at the turn of the century because he got John's date wrong, as he did regarding others, except Paul and the Apocalypse. He located John after 160 C.E., but already in 1854 the Tübingen "Schooler" Adolf Hilgenfeld was moving the date earlier in the second century. By the 1890s it was common to date John between 100 and 110, and they used Baur's arguments to do so. His most complete single production on this Gospel is his "Critical Investigations of the Canonical Gospels," published in 1847 (Kümmel 1972, 82). He and the school that followed him practiced what he called "tendency criticism." The author of each writing had a thesis or theses he was trying to establish, and he used the materials of his tradition to demonstrate it or them.

Take, for example, Strauss's analysis of the Fourth Evangelist's account of John the Baptist, as discussed above. Strauss's conclusion was that what this Evangelist had to say about the Baptist was a free composition by the author, not authentic history, as were many other sections in the Fourth Gospel. Now Baur does not disagree with that, but he picks up where Strauss stops, so to speak, asking *why* the Johannine Evangelist might have freely composed the way he did. Baur thinks the author knew about that figure wearing camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, and prophesying of the impending judgment to come. A Tübingen School way of looking at this construct holds that the Evangelist is addressing a small sect of followers of the Baptist who are still around and perhaps saying that Jesus is subordinate to the Baptist, to whom *he* came for baptism. The author wants to counter that thrust and perhaps even to persuade those followers that they should join the Christian movement. This is a distinctive tendency, while a subordinate tendency, of this Gospel.

New Testament writings are "tracts for the times," and the Fourth Gospel is a tract for the time of its author. Its primary "time," however, is not specified by the relation of Jesus to the Baptist but to those referred to as "the Jews." "The Jews" are thus related to the most central tendency of the Gospel of John. The fundamental idea of this Gospel is the principle of light and life as it is incarnated in Jesus Christ, and this primary motif is contrasted starkly with the darkness of unbelief, represented by "the Jews." Jesus' opponents in John are not "scribes and Pharisees," or chief priests and Sadducees, as the Synoptics would have it, but "the Jews." The historical problem with this tension seems striking, even though debate on this matter has been extensive throughout the centuries. Jesus, after all, *is* a Jew, all of his disciples and followers are Jews, and the multitude around Jesus is also predominantly Jewish. It is thus a very peculiar turn of phrase to refer to the enemies of Jesus as "the Jews" in John, when its author and major subjects are Jewish. Baur consequently thinks that it is incredible that the Galilean fisherman, the son of Zebedee or another eyewitness, or a close associate of the former, would have written in that manner about Jesus and the Jews in the early first

century. In John, "the Jews" stand for stubborn and reprehensible unbelief. Even though in John 4:22 Jesus declares that "salvation is of the Jews," referring to the Old Testament preparation and to God's work through Jesus, the author in this "tract for his time" is engaged in a combat with hostile Judaism, so "the Jews" are characterized by *that* conflict.

The fury directed against Baur and the Tübingen School for rejecting John's apostolic authorship and denying that its writing was in early touch with the history of Jesus was considerable! The new revisionists, however, found the protests baseless. In 1847, Baur had just finished his two-volume work on Paul, probably the first great monograph on the subject, in which he claims that there are all kinds of letters in the New Testament ascribed to Paul that he did not write. Karl Köstlin, a Tübingen Schooler, wrote a study on this topic in the ancient world, documenting that it was common in Greco-Roman times to compose a writing in the name of another person; indeed, it was praiseworthy to do so. Sixty writings were presented under the name of Pythagoras by later successors in order to lend the works his authority and to honor him. Iamblichus, his biographer, applauds what they had done (Strauss 1864, 148). In the Hebraic tradition this has been done with the five books of Moses, the book of Daniel, the latter parts of Isaiah, and the Wisdom of Solomon. In the New Testament, besides the Pauline letters, even many of the most orthodox of critical scholars were conceding that 2 Peter was not written by Peter and that the first letter is in doubt. Charges against Baur and the Tübingen School were that they were turning the Gospel of John into a dishonest fraud and that their claims were only perverse misrepresentations—a projecting of the ideals of modern times back onto the ancient world, which had a very different orientation. In 1864, Strauss gave an account of the Tübingen School's standpoint about ancient times as follows:

Then all was considered true that was edifying; all old that was found to give light; all apostolical that seemed worthy of an apostle; and no one thought that he was doing a wrong to an Apostle, or even to Christ himself, but, on the contrary, every one considered that he was offering to either only the tribute due when he attributed to their lips or pens the best thing he knew of. Accordingly, if the author of the Fourth Gospel thought he had the true spirit, he shrank not from making Christ speak in this spirit, and that Apostle (John) seemed to him to be best adapted to be the interpreter of this spirit. (Strauss 1864, 148)

It is necessary here to say something about Baur's overall perspective on the early church. After the crucifixion and resurrection, the great challenge faced by primitive Christianity was how to understand its relation to Judaism. To begin with, it was a kind of sect within Judaism, but the missionary outreach into the Gentile world complicated that relationship greatly. What is the situation with respect to keeping the Jewish law? Does that law apply to Gentiles? Baur thinks this issue had become a mighty struggle that lasted for some time and reverberated through the early church. The book of Acts, written afterwards during a

time when harmony on the issue had been attained, projects that harmony back onto the earlier period Luke is writing about. Baur thinks the harmonious picture is unhistorical because Luke's tendency has a different purpose as a tract for his setting.

This is important for our task here, because Baur thinks the whole matter takes time. All the oppositions involved in this struggle had to be fought through, but by the time of the Gospel of John was written, the kind of conflicts Paul had to face and overcome had become located in the distant past. The Christian movement had clearly separated itself from Judaism, and now they were two different religions competing with each other. Says Baur: "We cannot but regard it as an indication of the late origin of the Gospel [of John], that the author sees Judaism so far behind him, and that the opposition of Judaism to Christianity is with him so entirely a standard and settled historical fact" (1878-79, 157). Righteousness is mentioned only once in John, and the discussions and controversies about the law have apparently faded from view. On the other hand, central Johannine themes are clearly unhistorical for the Tübingen School. For instance, Jesus as the "Bread of Life," eating his flesh, and drinking his blood have meaning for the church of the Gospel's time, but these would not have had meaning in the ministry of Jesus as a reply to his opponents or the multitude (John 6:48-58).

Bretschneider and Strauss were not only thoroughgoing historical revisionists; they also did not seem to think very highly of the content of the Fourth Gospel from a religious standpoint. With Baur, however, the valuation of John's theological content is very different. He sees the Gospel of John as the veritable consummation of Christian thought in the New Testament. The development of the Christian consciousness by purifying and disengaging itself from the particularities of Judaism is established as a universal principle of salvation. Says Baur,

This has come about at two different points, at each of which a series of phenomena has run its course, each independent of the other. The one point is to be found in the Church of Rome; the other in the Gospel of John. At both these points the Christian consciousness is working out its freer development.... In the Gospel of John this process of development presents itself to us on its ideal side, in the Church of Rome on its practical (or institutional) side. In the former the development of the Christian consciousness already bears the character of a Christian theology. (1878-79, 180)

Notice the prominence of the word "development" in the quotation. Theology is a type of reflection that presupposes the action and experience of living. The movement of history brings truth to fruition, which is implicit in human events and experiences, even when it has to pass through strife and conflict. Baur has been castigated for generations for holding such a perspective, that by doing so he read his Hegelianism into the New Testament. The objectors said, and it was reiterated in so many words by the British around the turn of the twentieth century against Baur, that Jesus not only claimed he was the truth but also articulated the

theological content of this truth in his statements from the start, as this has been recorded by the Johannine apostle. No development is required.

In any case, Baur holds that the Fourth Gospel assumes the character of a developed theology, an exceptionally important theology, and this represents a profound accomplishment. This insight, however, bears a price tag in three ways. First, this theology as a "tract for the time" is executed as a history of Jesus. We have already seen an illustration of the historical problems related to distinguishing the comments of Jesus and John the Baptist above, and we will return to this theological shaping of history below. Second, it places into the words of Jesus a language that belongs to a later time, making it anachronistic. Third, the fundamental vulnerability of seeing Jesus Christ as the incarnate Logos is that it too easily leads into ahistorical Docetism.

Baur strongly emphasizes the centrality of the idea of the Logos for the Fourth Gospel, so that it is not only a matter of the Prologue but continues through the book, although not explicitly discussed. Karl Hase, a contemporary theologian and an author of a life of Jesus, characterized Baur's interpretation of John as "the novel of the Logos," that is, as a work of fiction about this eternal idea (see Baur 1975). Baur, as Strauss before him, sees John's use of the Logos as derived from Philo. While there are decisive passages that emphasize the incarnation of this Logos in Jesus Christ, difficulties result in the way Strauss had lifted up the virtual omniscience and omnipotence possessed by Jesus in this Gospel. When he meets the woman of Samaria, for instance, he knows she has had five husbands. This feature occurs in John a number of times. Jesus is conscious of his oneness with God—even of his eternal being "before Abraham" (John 8:52–58). Baur considers this docetic and unhistorical. There is no temptation, no agony in the garden, and no cry of being abandoned. Aside from John the Baptist, Jesus appears to preserve an attitude of distance from "his friends." The Synoptics' theme, "and he had compassion," really does not fit with Jesus in the Gospel of John. In the Synoptics Jesus does mighty works in the context of the faith of the recipient. In John, Jesus' performs miracles in order to bring about belief in him. The Tübingen School finds these contrasts indicative of the unhistoricity of the Evangelist's portrayal.

Baur was also one of the first investigators of Gnosticism. He thinks the Fourth Gospel draws significantly on the language and concepts of a proto-Gnosticism in its contemporary statement of the universal truth of Christianity. The gnostic dualisms of light and darkness, natural life and a higher spiritual life, and people who belong to this spiritual realm and those who do not are reflected clearly in John. John rejects ontological dualism because of the author's view of God's creation, but the descent of the redeemer from the realm of light to save those who possess a spiritual nature influences what is said. Redemption is effected for the believer in the present, not in an eschatological age to come. It is most important that Jesus communicate a proper type of knowledge to people. The Evangelist manifests a positive relation to Gnosticism in his propensity to have Jesus mysteriously appear and disappear in spectral-like fashion



(Baur 1847, 286). As one can imagine, Baur finds such presentations docetic and unhistorical. While Baur approves the importance of the conceptuality of light, he thinks that protognostic language does not belong to the thought world of Jesus, and, consequently, it is unhistorical when John presents Jesus saying that he is the light of the world and that one who follows him will have the light of life (John 8:12).

But Baur's most sustained exploration of the difficulty with John as a historical source comes through an extended consideration of the date of Jesus' death. The old problem involves the variance concerning the date of this event. According to the Synoptics, it was the fifteenth of the month of Nisan, but according to John the fourteenth. On the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan, the lambs for the Passover festival were slain in the temple at Jerusalem. The Synoptics say that Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover on his last evening, but in John it was on the preceding day, prior to the festival, so that Jesus was in the grave when the Paschal lamb was eaten by the Jews. According to Mark, Jesus was crucified about nine o'clock in the morning, but John indicates that Jesus was dead by five o'clock. The Old Testament instructions say the lamb is to be slain in the afternoon for Passover, and John says that so Jesus was.

Why the author of John proceeds in the manner he does is indicated by John 19:31–36. At the request of the Jews, Pilate gives the command for the thighs of Jesus and the others on Golgotha to be broken so that they might be buried before sunset, but the soldiers find Jesus already dead and so do not carry out the order in his case. John then tells the reader that this happened in order that the Old Testament might be fulfilled: "a bone of him shall not be broken" (see Exod 12:46). What is being spoken of? The Paschal lamb. This means that John regards Jesus as the true Paschal lamb, and his suffering and death must precisely agree with the injunctions about the Paschal lamb. The lamb had to be chosen on the tenth of Nisan, according to Exod 12:3, so John says that the anointing of Jesus in Bethany took place on the sixth day before the feast (John 12:1–3). Yet Mark 14:1 tells us that it happened on the second day before it. Reckoning backward from the fifteenth of Nisan as the first day of the feast, this connects the sixth day before the feast with the tenth, in accord with Exodus. Again, the fate of Jesus is made to carry out exactly the entire fate of a Paschal lamb. John continues with this utilization of the Old Testament in the account of the history of the cross.

Baur says that for John the repeated types of Paschal lambs have now been fulfilled by the true and real one: "the type ceases to be what it is as soon as the substance to which it refers has come" (1878–79, 159). Therefore, this event is the turning point at which Judaism ceased to be what it had been until then. "By this fact Christianity has now disengaged itself from its connections with Judaism and taken its place as the true religion" (1878–79, 159).

This discussion of the manner in which the Fourth Evangelist presents the crucifixion has great importance for Baur beyond the material itself. The pattern we have seen in Bretschneider, Strauss, and much of Baur has frequently focused



on the difference between John and the Synoptics, with their conclusion being that it is highly probable that the Synoptics are closer to authentic history than John. This matter of the Paschal lamb, however, is especially revealing to Baur. John and the Synoptics cannot be harmonized, but others choose John as more reliable on this story than the Synoptics as they do elsewhere. But in *this case* they would have to assert an unbelievable concatenation of accidents for the history of Jesus to fulfill perfectly the instructions for the treatment of the Paschal lamb! That is, what a coincidence that Jesus is anointed (an action associated with death) on the tenth of Nisan, when the Passover lambs are selected; what a coincidence that Jesus is crucified on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan, when the lambs for Passover were killed; what a coincidence that Jesus had already died when the soldiers came to break his legs, fulfilling the Exodus text; and what a coincidence with the true lamb having died that a soldier pierces his side with a lance in accord with Zech 12:10. Baur and the Tübingen School say that those are too many coincidences for a historian to accept. However, the arch-orthodox theologian E. W. Hengstenberg said no; they are *not* accidents. Rather, the providence of God has disposed things to fit what John unerringly reports!

To this, Baur shakes his head, seeing another instance of the dogmatism that he thought it was his vocation to overcome by pursuing a historical theology. What he sees is that the Evangelist has bent and reshaped the events to fit the theology that he wants to elaborate and has done this with careful deliberation. Still more, however, is indicated by this passage. From the wound in Jesus' side issues blood and water, and, coincidentally, how appropriate it is that the two substances symbolizing the two sacraments are seen after his death. The blood is a figure of the atonement and therefore the symbol of Christ's redeeming work accomplished by the death. The water is the symbol of the Spirit, and Baur recalls what the Evangelist has said in 7:38–39, “‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive,” when the time of Jesus' glorification came. The verses about the lance thrust and the emitted blood and water are found only in John, and this event as another “striking coincidence” leads Baur to the following conclusion.

The Fourth Evangelist has repeatedly driven home the point that the literal or bodily dimension must properly be understood symbolically as representing ideal truth. This is the final concern of this author. Salvation flows from the death of Christ, and here the Evangelist in overwhelming probability has composed “history that is really unhistorical” in order to give bodily expression to this ideal truth (Baur 1975, 40). It is the witness of inner sight into “the true poetry and profound symbolism” of the lance thrust and its consequences that is found in the historical presentation of 19:34–35 (Baur 1975, 39). Baur thinks that the principle found here applies to much, although not all, of the other material distinctive to the Fourth Gospel. Thereby it manifests that the Gospel of John is not intended to be historical, either in the modern sense of nineteenth-century Europe or in the sense of the selective recollections of the Synoptics. What the Evangelist cares

most about is not history but rather the theological reality of who Jesus is, which “history” properly shaped can express.

Baur’s analysis of the death of Jesus and the Paschal lamb was followed by many New Testament critics for the rest of the century. However, his “ideal truth” that gives rise to historical presentation of the unhistorical provoked great controversy. Baur’s position became either the point of view or the view to attack for the discussion of the Gospel of John over the next several generations. His section on John in the “Critical Investigations” (1847) also lifted up the importance of the Prologue as a preparation for the contents of the Gospel that followed. Baur laid out the artificial utilization of triads by the author to deploy the history of Jesus. Chapters 1–6, 7–12, and 13–20 are the three main divisions of the Gospel, and within those segments are more specific triads. Starting with the threefoldness of 1:1, the Gospel follows this triadic pattern. John 2–6 are arranged according to the following scheme: chapter 2 involves two narratives (the miracle at Cana and the cleansing of the temple); 3:1–4:42 presents discourses of Jesus that serve to interpret these narratives; 4:43–5:16 displays two miracles of healing; 5:17–47 features a discourse of Jesus on the healing of the Jewish people; 6:1–21 narrates the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water; and 6:22–71 presents the related discourse on Jesus as the Bread of Life. Baur sharpened the sensitivity of later New Testament researchers to triads, and by 1892 Heinrich Holtzmann, also a revisionist, produced the following in his introduction to the New Testament:

Everything that the Logos does appears to be distributed and circumscribed through numerical arrangement. The Prologue begins with three propositions; three days are spent with the Baptist; three times Jesus is in Galilee; three times he journeys to Judea; three Passovers and three other feasts fall within his ministry; three mighty works are related of the Judean field and three of the Galilean field; three divisions are expressly made of the discourse on the last day of Tabernacles; three disclosures of the traitor are made by Jesus; three times he is himself condemned; three times Pilate attempts to save him; three words are spoken from the cross; after three days he rises and appears three times to the disciples.... This reflective mysticism of triads, which includes not only individual scenes but the entire public life of Jesus, appears to be bent to demonstrate an artificial and artistic arrangement of history, unless with Hengstenberg one traces it back to the design of Jesus and the disposition of divine providence. (1892, 438–39)

Holtzmann, like Baur forty-five years before, is concerned about this artificial artistry. It may be aesthetically impressive, but it is not reliable historically. Again, the composition of the Fourth Evangelist has subordinated history to something else, this time to numerical artistry. By the 1890s “some nineteenth-century German scholarship” on John had become a prominent mainline! As one of the leading revisionists challenging John’s historicity, thereby de-Johannifying the Jesus of history, Baur not only employed the dialectical method; he embodied it. Only time will tell if a more nuanced synthesis will emerge from the revisionist antithesis.

## THE DE-JOHANNIFICATION OF JESUS: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

*Mark Allan Powell*

Jack Verheyden's survey of nineteenth-century scholarship describes a decline of traditional positions regarding the authorship and historical reliability of John's Gospel and an ascendancy of revisionist postures that would ultimately represent the new orthodoxy for critical biblical scholarship. I will now attempt to describe how these tendencies played out in the twentieth century, and on to the present day.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the distinctive portraits of Jesus offered by John and the Synoptic Gospels had come to be regarded as largely irreconcilable, and a clear preference for the historicity of the Synoptic portrait had emerged. This preference appears to have been informed by at least three factors. (1) The Synoptic portrait had three Gospels in its favor, while the Johannine portrait had only one. Where there were discrepancies, John almost always appeared to be the odd one out. (2) John was generally regarded as the latest of the four Gospels. Written at least a decade, and possibly several decades, after Matthew, Mark, and Luke, its witness was the easiest to dismiss on grounds of temporal distance. (3) John's Gospel was the most blatantly theological of the four. It appeared to be the most inclined toward inculcating faith (20:31) and, consequently, the least concerned with reporting facts.

At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves, we should note that the force of each of these rationales for the demotion of John in Jesus studies would be curtailed somewhat in the twentieth century. First, source criticism would lead biblical scholars to regard the close agreements between Matthew, Mark, and Luke as a consequence of literary dependence rather than as evidence of independent multiple attestation. Once the options became John versus Mark, John versus Q, John versus M, or John versus L, the conflicts were no longer perceived as one-against-three but one against-one; the *quantitative* advantage of the Synoptic tradition was revealed to be a canonical illusion. Second, even though most scholars would continue to regard John's Gospel as the last of the four to be completed, most prominent reconstructions of the book's composition history would allow for

some of its content to come from a much earlier time, such as a Signs Gospel or eyewitness accounts of the Beloved Disciple; the *temporal* advantage of the Synoptic tradition was not lost, but it was relativized somewhat by this recognition. Finally, redactional studies would expose the theological tendencies of all four Gospels to an extent that John would no longer appear unique as a book that intentionally promotes a particular version of the faith. Most scholars would still say that John was the most indulgent or “developed” in this regard, but the distinction seemed now to be more a matter of degree than of basic character; the supposedly *objective* advantage of the Synoptic tradition was diminished.

In short, the primary reasons for preferring the Synoptic Gospels to John in historical Jesus studies would lose some of their force as the twentieth century progressed. Still, as we will see, the Fourth Gospel continued to be relegated to a position of relative (and often intentional) neglect. I suspect that this was largely due to the extreme caution that characterized the “new quest” and to strong reliance on a “criterion of dissimilarity” intended to insure the minimally secure results that such caution could allow. But now we really are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us start at the beginning.

Much twentieth-century scholarship on the historical Jesus may be understood as a response to the one-two punch of Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann. Schweitzer’s incredibly influential book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* made a number of contributions to the field, but its most obvious immediate effect was to call into question the possibility of the enterprise.<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer demonstrated the subjectivity of historical Jesus scholarship to a greater extent than had been previously recognized, exposing the degree to which even the most reputable scholars inevitably tended to perceive the object of their inquiry in line with their own interests and inclinations. In seeking to avoid such bias himself, Schweitzer discovered a Jesus whom he declared to be “a stranger and an enigma” to our time, a flawed and ultimately irrelevant figure he had little interest in following (2001, 478). In retrospect, Schweitzer’s work seems to have initiated what we might now call a catch-22 in historical Jesus studies: The mark of unbiased scholarship was that it did not try to establish Jesus as relevant for the modern day, but if the historical figure of Jesus is not relevant for today, why bother studying him in the first place? The field was at an impasse and entered a dry spell: the next fifty years were characterized by a notable disinterest in historical reconstructions of Jesus based on either the Synoptic or Johannine traditions.

Rudolf Bultmann aided this disinterest by enabling biblical theology to move in a decidedly different direction. If Schweitzer had questioned the *possibility* of learning anything relevant about the historical Jesus, Bultmann challenged the *necessity* of doing so. In a number of important papers published two decades

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1. Originally published in 1906, the best edition in English is now the full translation of the 1913 edition by John Bowden (Schweitzer 2001).

after Schweitzer's tome, Bultmann averred that Christian faith is an engagement with the existential truth imbedded in the stories and traditions about Jesus; what the historical person named Jesus actually said and did is inconsequential (Bultmann 1969a; 1969b; see also 1958). It is no accident that Bultmann would later publish a quintessential commentary on the Gospel of John (1971; German ed. in 1941). Schweitzer's strange and enigmatic Jesus had been an apocalyptic prophet based largely on the Synoptic tradition. Bultmann's existentialist Jesus embodied the here-and-now orientation of the Fourth Gospel. It is only a minor oversimplification to say that Schweitzer offered the world an irrelevant-but-historical Synoptic Jesus, while Bultmann offered a relevant-but-nonhistorical Johannine Jesus.

What would come to be called the "new quest" for the historical Jesus began, oddly enough, with Bultmann's own students. Ernst Käsemann gets credit for proposing it in 1953 and James M. Robinson for officially launching it in 1959 (see Käsemann 1964; Robinson 1959). The basic idea was to conduct a fresh investigation into the life and teachings of Jesus that could benefit from advances in source criticism and avoid mistakes of the past. In essence, then, this new quest was a chastened quest and, accordingly, a cautious one. Norman Perrin established their motto as "when in doubt, discard": a great deal of the Gospel material might be authentic, but the historian's task is to identify an "irreducible minimum" of material that can be verified in accord with the strictest canons of historical research (Perrin 1967, 39). To accomplish this, Perrin proposed that the fundamental criterion of the quest be "dissimilarity": material in the Gospel tradition can be reliably attributed to Jesus only when it is (1) sufficiently distinct from the Jewish world in which he lived not to have originated there and been falsely attributed to him; and (2) sufficiently distinct from the concerns of the early church not to have been attributed to him by Christians wishing to make him the promoter of their own interests. Perrin studied the teachings of Jesus in light of this criterion and came up with a list of thirty-five sayings (or complexes of sayings) that could confidently be attributed to Jesus. None of these came from the Gospel of John.<sup>2</sup>

The new quest initially avoided the pre-Schweitzer penchant for biographies. The closest thing to a "life of Jesus" was *Jesus of Nazareth* by Günther Bornkamm, who actually opened his book with the sentence: "No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus" (1995, 13). Schweitzer, Bornkamm maintained, had delivered the "funeral oration" on such attempts. Thus Bornkamm dis-

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2. Norman Perrin 1976, 41. A surprising amount of unparalleled material from Matthew and Luke met Perrin's standards, due perhaps to the comparative weight he gave to his "criterion of dissimilarity" as opposed to "multiple attestation." Unquestionably authentic material found only in Matthew included 13:44-46; 18:23-35; 20:1-16; 21:28-32; unquestionably authentic material found only in Luke included 9:62; 10:29-37; 14:28-32; 15:3-32; 16:1-9; 18:1-8, 9-14.

played very little interest in chronology of events or in Jesus' motives, goals, or self-understanding. He concentrated, rather, on developing a list of historically indisputable facts about Jesus (e.g., he was a Jew from Nazareth; his father was a carpenter; he spoke Aramaic; he was baptized by John) and on outlining the major foci of his teaching (e.g., the presence of the kingdom; radical interpretations of the law). Notably, Bornkamm cites the Gospel of John only four times as a source for information about Jesus not found in the Synoptics, and even then he does not find any "indisputable facts."<sup>3</sup> He cites John only once as a source in which information that *conflicts* with what is found in the Synoptics is deemed worthy of consideration, and even then he decides that the Synoptic account is to be preferred.<sup>4</sup>

This was the paradigm for most of what was to come, though the discipline of Jesus studies lapsed into another spell of relative inactivity following the work of Bultmann's students until the last decade of the millennium. The veritable explosion of work in the 1990s was distinctive in many respects but not, for the most part, in its treatment of John. This may be seen most obviously in the work of the Jesus Seminar, whose major publications would scrutinize the sayings and deeds of Jesus in a manner similar to (though more intense than) the examinations undertaken by Perrin and Bornkamm (Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993; Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998). Like Perrin, the Seminar considered which sayings of Jesus could be deemed authentic according to strict historical criteria for verification, but they expanded the project to include consideration of *all* sayings attributed to Jesus in early sources, and they assigned those sayings to four color-coded tiers that designated *levels* of acceptability. Just as Perrin did not include anything from John in his "irreducible minimum" of authentic sayings, so the Jesus Seminar found no "red" sayings (= definitely authentic) in John. Indeed, they found only one "pink" saying (= possibly authentic), and that was in a verse that is paralleled in Mark (John 4:44; Mark 6:4). Further, of 139 inauthentic sayings, only five earned the milder "grey" rating, the rest being placed in the harshest category ("black"), reserved for material considered to be completely spurious (Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993, 401–70). As for the deeds of Jesus, the Seminar found only eight statements about Jesus derived from John

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3. Bornkamm 1995, 80, 96, 145, 165 (with reference to John 9:1ff.; 7:15; 1:35ff.; 19:19–21, respectively).

4. Bornkamm 1995, 160. The issue is the date of the crucifixion (John 18:28). These statistics are based on references listed in the book's scripture index. Bornkamm also cites John twenty-one times in reference to the Gospel's theological claims, which he regards as blatantly nonhistorical, twice to provide information about the ancient world (specifically, Samaritan religion), and fourteen times as a cross-reference on matters where the Synoptic account is the primary material under discussion.

that might be designated red or pink (definitely or possibly accurate), and only two of these concern information that is not also provided in the Synoptics.<sup>5</sup>

The Jesus Seminar's publications offered a more blatant denigration of John than had been presented previously. Perrin, Bornkamm, and others had for the most part set the book aside out of a cautious concern to focus on the material that was widely considered to be the most reliable. The Jesus Seminar did *not* set the book aside but, to the contrary, paid greater attention to the Gospel of John than anyone in the field of historical Jesus studies ever had before. They analyzed every verse and pericope of the Fourth Gospel, scrutinizing each passage for any scintilla of possibly authentic or verifiable material. Still, the results of their investigation turned out to be in line with what others had intuited. They ended up taking some flak for this. In a sense, the Seminar was only making explicit what had been previously implied, but the outward effect was to expose the Fourth Gospel's inadequacies in a very public and (for many) disconcerting manner. Other scholars had treated John like a student who lacked prerequisites for upper-division study, excluding the Gospel from consideration on matters for which it seemed unqualified. The Jesus Seminar allowed the Fourth Gospel to have its chance at last, placing it in competition alongside the others—but with predictably disastrous results. A groundswell of sympathy for John arose, though the specific results of the study were rarely contested.

This last point is striking when one reviews the conservative and evangelical critiques of the Jesus Seminar that appeared at this time.<sup>6</sup> Complaints were offered about many matters, but the group's evaluation of John's Gospel was almost never an issue. Ben Witherington III (1995a), for instance, wrote specifically about the Seminar's assessment of source material, concluding with three critical allegations: (1) they make inappropriate use of apocryphal Gospels, particularly Thomas; (2) they display too much confidence in the ability of modern

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5. The eight accepted facts about Jesus are: (1) Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist (1:35, by inference); (2) some of John's disciples became followers of Jesus (1:35–42); (3) Jewish leaders regarded Jesus as uneducated (7:15); (4) Jesus was arrested (18:12); (5) Jesus was taken to Pilate's residence (18:28); (6) Pilate had Jesus beaten (19:1); (7) Pilate turned Jesus over to be crucified (19:16); (8) Jesus was crucified (19:18). Numbers 2 and 3 provide information not stated in the Synoptics. Of these eight statements, the first six are rated "pink" and the last two "red." The Jesus Seminar also accorded red type to the innocuous fact that "Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas" (18:1). See Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998, 365–440.

6. See, for instance, the several essays in Wilkens and Moreland 1995. Various attacks on the Jesus Seminar can be found on pages 2–5, 18–27, 74–94, 102, 126–29, 142–46, 181–82, but the group's assessment of John is never critiqued. Indeed, the alternative projections for authentic sayings and deeds of Jesus offered in key chapters by Darrell L. Bock (1995) and Craig A. Evans (1995) restrict themselves almost entirely to Synoptic material. See also Luke Timothy Johnson 1996, 14 and 198. Johnson does mention what he seems to regard as an excessively skeptical view of John on the part of the Jesus Seminar, but he does not make this a major part of his critique or offer anything in the way of substantive refutation.



scholarship to reconstruct Q; and (3) they devalue the primacy of Mark (relative to Q and Thomas). Noticeable by absence is any reference to their treatment of John. The 1990s was a fractious decade for Jesus studies, but virtually everyone seemed to agree that the controversies had to be resolved without bringing John into the mix.

The work of E. P. Sanders was often located at the opposite end of a continuum from that of the Jesus Seminar: his Schweitzeresque presentation of Jesus as an eschatological prophet of Jewish restoration theology is regarded as the antithetical alternative to the Seminar's portrait of a peasant sage who had perhaps been influenced by Cynic philosophy (Sanders 1993; see also Sanders 1985). Sanders's work differs drastically from that of Bornkamm as well, but, like Bornkamm, Sanders develops lists of statements about Jesus that are "almost beyond dispute," and, like both Bornkamm and the Jesus Seminar, his understanding of Jesus owes practically nothing to the Gospel of John. Of the fifteen almost indisputable facts that Sanders lists in *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, seven are points found in the Synoptics alone, and eight are points found in all four Gospels, such that John might, at best, be understood to confirm what is stated elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> One searches in vain to find anything in Sanders's view of Jesus that would derive from Johannine testimony alone. In this regard, his discussion of the trial of Jesus is particularly interesting: he allows that certain aspects of the Johannine account have greater "intrinsic probability" than what is offered by the Synoptics; he is sorely tempted to prefer John to the Synoptics at these points but ultimately decides that it would be arbitrary to do so, given the general unreliability of the Fourth Gospel everywhere else (Sanders 1993, 66–73).

Gerd Theissen was one of the most significant German scholars working on the historical Jesus during this period, and his portrait of Jesus as an eschatological prophet is similar in many respects to that of Sanders (see Theissen and Merz 1998). Theissen deems the Johannine material "not worthless," faint praise earned only by virtue of it being (in his estimation) independent of the Synoptic tradition (Theissen and Merz 1998, 36). He finds a couple of details in the material that are probably acceptable: Jesus' first disciples had formerly followed John the Baptist (1:35–40), and three of them came from Bethsaida (1:44). He also thinks that there are a few matters on which the Johannine passion account should be allowed to correct the Synoptic version: the Jewish leaders had political motivations for seeking Jesus' death (11:47–53; 19:12); the so-called Jewish trial was actually just a hearing before the Sanhedrin (18:19–24); and the date of the crucifixion was probably 14 Nisan (18:28; 19:35). These (five) points, Theissen

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7. Sanders 1993, 10–11. In his earlier work (1985) Sanders presented somewhat different categorized lists; nothing was recognized as "virtually certain," "highly probable" or even "probable" on the basis of Johannine testimony alone. See his summary (1985, 326–27).



thinks, represent "old traditions" (Theissen and Merz, 1998, 36–37). Still, this is not much in terms of an overall portrait.

When reviewing the work of Sanders, Theissen, and scholars with similar ideas,<sup>8</sup> one might suspect a connection between "eschatological portraits of Jesus" and "primacy of the Synoptic tradition" (and be tempted to raise chicken-or-the-egg questions accordingly). But the 1990s were also a heyday for the *noneschatological* Jesus, and the studies that promoted *that* image did not rely on John's Gospel either. Notable here are the individual projects of Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, and Robert Funk (all members of the Jesus Seminar).<sup>9</sup> All of these scholars found John's eschatology (though not necessarily its Christology) more appealing than that of the Synoptics: the idea of a Jesus who proclaims liberating truth (8:32) and who speaks of present-day life enhancement (10:10) rather than postmortem, other-worldly bliss would have fit rather nicely with their conception of Jesus as a sort of Jewish philosopher who challenged conventional wisdom and value systems. Still, what is appealing is not necessarily historical, and these scholars do not in fact appeal to the Johannine tradition to support their idea of a *noneschatological* Jesus (or, as they might prefer to say, a Jesus whose eschatology was "ethical" rather than "apocalyptic").<sup>10</sup>

N. T. Wright would classify the types of studies that we have been discussing into two broad categories (Wright 1996, 83–84). He coined the term "third quest" to refer to those scholars (like Sanders and Theissen) who hearken back to Schweitzer by (1) regarding Jesus as an eschatological prophet with a strong apocalyptic perspective and (2) seeking to locate him completely within the world of relatively non-Hellenized Palestinian Judaism (Wright 1992b, 796–802). According to Wright, other scholars (especially the Jesus Seminar) were merely continuing the "new quest" initiated by Bultmann's students. Wright placed himself securely in line with the third quest scholars, and he would soon become their most prolific and high-profile advocate.

Whatever we make of Wright's categories,<sup>11</sup> assessment of the Johannine tradition was not a factor in the classification. Thus, Wright begins his own study of the historical Jesus by indicating that "this book is based on the synoptic gospels"

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8. See especially Dale C. Allison Jr. 1999; Bart D. Ehrman 1999. Both Allison and Ehrman regard Jesus as an apocalyptic herald of the end times. Neither presents a portrait of him that owes much to the Johannine tradition.

9. See especially Marcus J. Borg 1988; John Dominic Crossan 1991; Robert W. Funk 1996.

10. Paul Anderson (2006b, 85–88) notes the compatibility of Johannine material with many emerging portraits of Jesus, especially those proposed by Marcus Borg.

11. They are criticized as artificial and as implying some evolutionary development that characterizes much current work as outmoded, while presenting his own work as part of "the real leading edge of contemporary Jesus scholarship" (Wright 1996, 84). Crossan (1993, 10–11) says that Wright's attempts at categorization fall "somewhere between the tendentious and the hilarious."

(Wright 1996, xvi). At first, this appears to be just one more illustration of what we have been saying: that the avoidance of Johannine material was characteristic of historical Jesus studies of all stripes. But now we see a subtle difference. The *reason* Wright gives for limiting his research to the Synoptic Gospels is because “the debate ... has been conducted almost entirely in terms of the synoptic tradition” (xvi). He also allows that he is less acquainted with the field of Johannine studies, although he hopes to expand his expertise more in that direction in the future. Persons touring the Himalayas, he jokes, should not have to rely on a guide who has studied the Alps: let’s stick with the Alps for now; perhaps we’ll have time to visit the Himalayas later (xvi).

We should notice what Wright does *not* say. The Jesus Seminar rejected Johannine testimony because “whatever the compositional history, the Fourth Gospel is not thought to provide independent historical attestation to the events in the life of the historical Jesus” (Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998, 19). Theissen (and many others) *do* think that John’s account is independent, but it represents a “deviation” from the broadly attested Synoptic tradition, with “Gnostic colouring,” such that “the historical value of the Synoptics is clearly to be rated higher” (Theissen and Merz 1998, 97). For Sanders, the key point is degree of theological development: “the synoptic authors revised traditional material much less thoroughly than did John” (Sanders 1993, 73). Bart Ehrman agrees but pays even more attention to dating: the rule with sources is “the earlier the better,” which means “our best source of all would be Paul (who regrettably doesn’t tell us very much), and then Q and Mark, followed by M and L, and so on” (Ehrman 1999, 88). Note that (for Ehrman) John is not even on the list: the Fourth Gospel is relegated to generic inclusion in a vague etcetera, along with various apocryphal and patristic writings. That judgment is made explicit by Crossan, who (somewhat idiosyncratically) dates the completion of John’s Gospel to 120–150, grouping it with the Apocryphon of James and the Gospel of Peter as part of what he considers to be the fourth (and worst) stratum of material for learning about Jesus.<sup>12</sup> But Wright says nothing (here) about date or independence or Gnosticism or extent of theological development. The point seems to be, “I know how this game is played, and if I must make my case on the basis of the Synoptic tradition, so be it. For now.”

Before moving on, we should note that throughout the entire period we have been discussing there were numerous scholars who did not share the skeptical appraisal of John characteristic of the mainstream: Craig Blomberg, D. A. Carson, Leon Morris, and others have strenuously and persistently argued for the historical authenticity of Johannine materials.<sup>13</sup> Paramount among their claims is that John alone of the four canonical Gospels appears to have been authored (at least

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12. Crossan 1991, 432. An earlier edition of John is placed (along with Matthew and Luke) in the third stratum, an extremely broad period extending from 80–120 C.E.

13. See Craig L. Blomberg 2002; D. A. Carson 1991; 1981; Leon Morris 1995; 1969.

in part) by an eyewitness (21:24), specifically by an eyewitness to the crucifixion (19:35). Their arguments on this and other points have not carried the day for many persons involved in historical Jesus studies, although, to my observation, their work has not been reviewed (much less refuted) with the same care accorded to other contributors. The apparent reason for this is that these scholars are all known to harbor ideological prejudices that treat the historical reliability of biblical writings as a confessional concern. Thus, they run afoul of a common assumption within the academic guild, namely, that ideologically motivated arguments are intrinsically less sound than those formulated from positions of relative neutrality. I note, with some irony, that this is the same post-Enlightenment presupposition that causes the credibility of John's Gospel to be questioned in the first place: work that is willfully and admittedly evangelical (20:31) is immediately suspect. Carson says, "To set theological commitment and historical reliability against each other as *necessarily* mutually incompatible is unrealistic" (1991, 40). He intends this comment as an apology for the Fourth Gospel, although he might just as well have offered it as a defense of scholars (like him) who write about that Gospel from a defiantly confessional position.

In any case, the primary exception to the twentieth century's marginalization of John in historical Jesus scholarship is found in the work of John Meier. Unlike Wright (on this point), Meier does not seem to care about respecting the rules of the game when he thinks those rules do not make sense. In the first portion of his multivolume magnum opus, *A Marginal Jew*, Meier declares, "The 'tyranny of the synoptic Jesus' should be consigned to the dustbin of the post-Bultmannians."<sup>14</sup> As his study progresses, he determines that a number of matters from John ought to be regarded as historically authentic. He decides that John is right in portraying Jesus' ministry as lasting longer than one year and involving multiple trips to Jerusalem (the Synoptic Gospels present a shorter ministry, with only one trip to Jerusalem at the end; Meier 1991, 403–6). He believes that Jesus himself baptized people (John 3:22, 26), a fact never mentioned in the Synoptics (Meier 1994, 121–23). He regards the accounts of Jesus healing the paralyzed man by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–9) and the blind man who washes in the pool of Siloam (9:1–7) as "stories that have a good chance of going back to some event in the life of the historical Jesus," and he likewise finds an historical core behind the narrative of the raising of Lazarus (John 11).<sup>15</sup>

Meier insists that the four canonical Gospels are the primary (although not exclusive) sources for historical Jesus reconstruction and that "our survey of the

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14. John P. Meier 1991, 45. The phrase he cites in this quote is derived from an article by Charles W. Hedrick (1989, 1–8). Meier's use of the phrase, however, is deliberately ironic, since Hedrick had meant it was time for scholarship to consider the historical testimony of *apocryphal* Gospels (which Meier for the most part rejects).

15. Meier 1994, 680–81, 694–98, 798–832; quotation from 726.

Four Gospels gives us three separate major sources to work with: Mark, Q, and John" (Meier 1991, 44). In itself, such a claim is not terribly controversial. Many Gospel scholars working in historical Jesus studies would hold that the Fourth Gospel is largely independent of the others (in keeping with Theissen, above, but not with the Jesus Seminar).<sup>16</sup> Many would also claim that it preserves more early testimony than any of the apocryphal Gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas, the Secret Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Peter, or Crossan's so-called Cross Gospel.<sup>17</sup> The real problem, even for those who grant these matters, is that the level of integration and homogenization in John appears to be greater.<sup>18</sup> In John, the strands of primitive material appear to have been so thoroughly woven into the fabric of the community's theology that it is difficult to distinguish them, much less to determine what they looked like prior to this incorporation. Meier is, of course, aware of this problem: "the re-writing of narratives for symbolic purposes and the reformulation of sayings for theological programs reach their high point in John" (Meier 1991, 45). But for him "reformulation" is not an insurmountable obstacle. The goal is not to recover *ipsissima verba* (actual words Jesus spoke) but *ipsissima vox* (the kinds of things Jesus typically said; Meier 1991, 174). Likewise, narratives that have been reworked to bring out their symbolic meaning may still reveal something about the sort of things that Jesus typically did.

The real issue, perhaps, is that virtually nothing in John's Gospel passes muster in light of Perrin's "criterion of dissimilarity." A major implication of that principle was that the authenticity of supposedly historical material contained in blatantly biased documents can only be affirmed with confidence when it does not reflect the bias of the document in which it is found. The greater integration and homogeneity of John's Gospel means that virtually nothing can be found here that does not reflect the book's bias. Indeed, the author and/or final editor admits as much in the book's twin codas (20:30–31; 21:25): many things have been left out, and everything included is intended to serve a particular purpose.

The legitimacy of this criterion of dissimilarity, however, came to be sharply challenged by many scholars in the last decade of the twentieth century. Meier, who is actually mild in his critique of the principle, notes that it is useful in

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16. The question of whether John is independent of the Synoptic Gospels remains unsettled. Scholars advocating dependence on Mark include C. K. Barrett, Franz Neirynck, and Thomas L. Brodie. The latter's work provides the most recent and comprehensive treatment (Brodie 1993). Prominent advocates of independence (the majority view) include Raymond Brown and D. Moody Smith (esp. Smith 2001, 195–241).

17. These apocryphal writings are notoriously difficult to date, but many Jesus scholars still place the earliest of them in the second century. Among scholars mentioned in this article, Allison, Anderson, Blomberg, Evans, Johnson, Meier, Sanders, Theissen, Witherington, and Wright seem fairly confident that John is earlier than these writings.

18. So Sanders 1993, 73: "The synoptic authors did not homogenize their material as John did. The joints and seams are visible."

uncovering what may have been Jesus' idiosyncrasies (such as his total prohibition of all oaths; Matt 5:34, 37), but he says that its application tends to highlight what was probably peripheral. And insofar as it embodies an *a priori* assumption that Jesus was unique, it effectively "places him outside of history" (Meier 1991, 172, also 171–74). Theissen proposes that the criterion of dissimilarity be replaced by a "criterion of historical plausibility," according to which "whatever helps to explain the influence of Jesus (on early Christianity) and at the same time can only have come into being in a Jewish context" is to be judged historical (see Theissen and Merz 1998, 116). Likewise, Wright suggests a "criterion of double similarity and double dissimilarity": when something is "decisively similar to both the Jewish context and the early Christian world and, at the same time, importantly dissimilar," we are likely to be dealing with historically authentic material that accounts for the move (via Jesus) from the one context to the other (Wright 1996, 131–33, 489).

The notion that the criterion of dissimilarity should be the *fundamental* principle in historical Jesus research had been put forward in an era where any attempt at reconstruction was controversial. In setting out to do what guild-orthodoxy claimed could not be done, the pioneers of the new quest had set understandably minimalist goals. They wanted to concentrate only on what was *most* certain. By the 1990s, however, the field had moved beyond compiling lists of indisputably assured facts or sayings. A reaction against such "piecemeal" approaches to Jesus set in, accompanied by the desire to construct overall portraits of Jesus that would make sense of more data. Thus, Wright would argue for a method of research he calls "critical realism," by which scholars advance hypotheses that account for the traditions we have.<sup>19</sup> According to this model, the most convincing reconstruction of the historical Jesus will be the one that remains inherently consistent while accounting for as much of the data as possible (Wright 1992a, 98–109; 1996, 133). In a different but analogous vein, James D. G. Dunn has argued for a model of research that appreciates the full implications of oral tradition: the Gospel traditions are different from one another because of "performance variations," but the historian should be most attentive to stable elements that are found across the board (Dunn 2003b).

This is a long way from "when in doubt, discard." The different approaches suggested by Meier, Theissen, Wright, and Dunn all view the beliefs of early Christianity not as a problem to be overcome (in order to get back to the pre-Christian, authentic Jesus) but as part of the phenomenon to be explained. Such proposals bear directly on assessments of the Fourth Gospel as a source for Jesus studies. Meier may have been the first to implement this, but others would follow suit. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003) broke with his earlier (reluctant?) commitment to stick with the Synoptic tradition. He now offers

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19. N. T. Wright 1992a, 81–120. This view is indebted to Ben F. Meyer 1979.

detailed consideration of the Johannine narratives (Wright 2003, 662–82), which he maintains, are to “be understood realistically and literally”; whatever non-historical echoes and resonances they contain are “set off by a literal description of a concrete set of events” (675). We might reasonably conclude that if *these* Johannine narratives can be read this way on *this* subject, then surely much more of John’s Gospel might have been utilized in the earlier project on Jesus’ pre-Easter life and teaching. The twentieth-century Wright seemed to confine himself to the Synoptic tradition out of some sense of obligation to the guild—it was just what Jesus scholars did. The twenty-first-century Wright is bolder, carrying out what now appear to be obvious implications of the methodological approach (“critical realism”) he outlined previously. If one is to utilize all of the data and try to account for as much of it as possible, then it hardly seems justifiable to stick with the Synoptic tradition just because that is where the debate has been or because that is where one has the most confidence or expertise.

Where does this leave us? We are not even close to an “emerging consensus,” but we may at least say that there is a “growing trend” in Jesus studies toward recognition of the Fourth Gospel as a “dissonant tradition” that not only *can* be utilized but *must* be, if the Synoptic tradition is not to be accorded free rein in a manner that increasingly seems uncritical. If John’s Gospel had not made it into the canon, if it had been lost to history only to be discovered now, the impact on historical Jesus studies would be revolutionary. Imagine! A book on the life and teachings of Jesus that is almost as early as the Synoptic Gospels, that claims to be based in part on eyewitness testimony, that contains some material that is almost certainly very primitive, that may very well be independent of the other Gospels while corroborating what they say at many points, and that offers what is ultimately a rather different (although not wholly incompatible) spin on the Jesus story. The implications of such a discovery would be *phenomenal*: every work previously written on the historical Jesus would be deemed obsolete and the full attention of scholarship would turn toward discovering what this alternative tradition had to offer. Of course, nothing like this has occurred, but many scholars seem to be saying, “we *do* have such a book; perhaps we should not ignore it.”

The work of the scholars associated with the Society of Biblical Literature’s Jesus, John, and History Group and the contributions of the scholars published in this volume are a part of this ongoing discussion.

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE BALKANIZATION OF JOHANNINE STUDIES

*D. A. Carson*

In preparation for writing this essay, I scanned afresh my own entries on all matters Johannine, preserved in my *Ibidem* and *Orbis* systems,<sup>1</sup> rapidly read through virtually all entries on John and the Johannine Epistles in the last ten years of *New Testament Abstracts*, reread sections of an assortment of books, and reread the papers and responses that were prepared for this SBL Group during the previous two years. I was trying to ascertain if my admittedly subjective assessment of the direction of Johannine studies during the past few decades could be supported by objective evidence.

My colleagues in this project have written some admirably encompassing surveys of developments along several axes of Johannine studies.<sup>2</sup> What I propose to do is survey the sheer sweep and diversity of current study of the Fourth Gospel, insofar as it bears, directly or tangentially, on questions of historicity. The weight of secondary literature is so vast that this essay makes no pretensions of being comprehensive. I hope it will be reasonably representative, a slightly blurry synchronic snapshot.<sup>3</sup> Then I shall reflect on what this sweep of research and writing says, for good and ill, about the state of Johannine studies. Only then will I venture some tentative suggestions about the way forward.

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1. Subsystems of the entirely praiseworthy *Nota Bene* suite.

2. In particular, the essays that devote the most space to survey and evaluation are those by Robert Kysar, Jack Verheyden, Mark Allan Powell, D. Moody Smith, John Painter, and Gilbert Van Belle.

3. Because the emphasis is on the present state of affairs, I have focused attention on the most recent literature, although on occasion I have mentioned significant developments of earlier decades. I have not broached the longer history of Johannine studies, admirably scanned in the recent commentary by Mark Edwards 2004.

## 1. THE SURVEY

Despite the fact that some recent surveys are remarkably upbeat about the convergences that are forming, I confess I am a little less sanguine. It is possible to detect trends, of course—as when Udo Schnelle argues that the basic methodological approach to the Johannine text is no longer source criticism but a focus on rhetoric and on the literary and theological unity of the Fourth Gospel<sup>4</sup> or when Jörg Frey observes that three recent German commentaries show a remarkable convergence of opinion on such basic issues as a post-70 C.E. date, location in Ephesus, relation to the Synoptic tradition, and relation to the Johannine epistles<sup>5</sup>—but I shall argue that there is less convergence than at first meets the eye and that what convergence exists is not all that remarkable.

So I begin by surveying some of the domains that are treated in current Johannine scholarship, especially if they have any bearing whatsoever on historical questions.

## 1.1. HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND MATTERS OF LITERARY DEPENDENCE

One way to approach historical questions is to examine the literary connections between John and a variety of potentially parallel pieces, trying to discern dependences or perhaps parallel developments in the tradition. Perhaps the most comprehensive one-volume study of such literary connections is the very recent and substantial work edited by Jörg Frey and his colleagues (Frey and Schnelle 2004), but the briefer work edited by Peter Hofrichter (2002) is also substantial. I shall say more about Sean Kealy's two-volume survey (2002) of the history of Johannine interpretation toward the end of this essay. All of these works leave one a little breathless at the sweep of the options, at the diversity of the positions offered.

Consider the possible literary connections between John and the Synoptics. In the wake of the work of P. Gardner-Smith (1938) and especially of C. H. Dodd (1963), there was widespread agreement that John was independent of the Synoptics. Historically speaking, what people made of this varied from the

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4. Udo Schnelle 1999. No less striking is the fact that a number of front-rank scholars formerly committed to dissecting John into different sources have gradually abandoned that approach in favor of reading this Gospel as a unified whole. For instance, Hartwig Thyen, whose bibliographical reviews in *Theologische Rundschau* across the years (1974, 1977, 1978, 1979), of matters Johannine, invariably supported source-critical approaches to John, ended up writing major essays for *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* in support of the view that meaningful exegesis of both John and 1 John must begin with the traditional text with coherent content (see Thyen 1987a; 1987b).

5. Jörg Frey 2000a. The three commentaries he reviews are by Ulrich Wilckens, Udo Schnelle, and Ludger Schenke, respectively.



assumption that the Fourth Gospel was practically useless as a source for what happened in the life and passion of the historical Jesus to the view that John's independence qualifies the book for new status as an alternative or competing authority—sometimes inferior, sometimes superior—over against the Synoptic witness. Between these two poles was an assortment of attempts to extract snippets of historically reliable information substantially removed from what the Fourth Gospel as we have it appears to say.<sup>6</sup> Today, however, those debates seem terribly oversimplified. The Louvain School argues strongly that John did in fact know Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The seminal work of F. Neirynck<sup>7</sup> and of M. Sabbe (1991) has now been expanded upon by their students. More important for our purposes, other mediating positions have been introduced. Some scholars hold that Luke was written last and either borrowed directly from John or depended primarily on Mark but under the influence of John.<sup>8</sup> Others find connections between John and Mark.<sup>9</sup> Still others have advanced complex interweavings of various editions.<sup>10</sup>

What of other literary dependencies? Doubtless the best-known theory is that the core of the Fourth Gospel is a Signs Source. Robert Fortna has been defending and refining his version of this theory for three decades,<sup>11</sup> but of course his is not the only version.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, numerous scholars have argued that there simply is not enough firm evidence to use a defined "Signs Source" as the foundation on which to build other theories.<sup>13</sup> The detailed source-critical approach intrinsic to Rudolf Bultmann's commentary (1971; German ed. in 1941) is no longer in vogue, owing not least to the sober and understated dismantling effected by D. Moody Smith (1965), but of course there are other appeals to a *Grundchrift* of some sort. The best known is that of G. Richter (1977), now refined and defended by J. Hainz (esp. 1992 and 2002) and his students. Probably it is true to say that the majority of scholars, without wanting to deny that the

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6. This, of course, was Dodd's position. It is often considered a "conservative" position but is such only in comparison with the view that John's Gospel is, on the whole, historically worthless. When I argued along such lines many years ago (Carson 1981), the point was challenged in various ways (see J. S. King 1983a, 1983b; and my response in Carson 1985).

7. F. Neirynck 1979; and many of his collected essays (1982; 1991; 2000a).

8. See, inter alios, Cribbs 1971; and esp. Shellard 1995; 2002. Cf. also Morgan 2002; Anderson 1996; 2002a; and 2006b; and Matson 1998; 2001; and 2002.

9. This line of inquiry keeps surfacing from time to time; see, for instance, Glasswell 1985.

10. See especially some of the essays of Paul N. Anderson, nicely summarized in his contribution to this volume, "Why This Study Is Needed, and Why It Is Needed Now."

11. See especially Robert T. Fortna 1970; 1988; 1992; and 2001.

12. E.g., John Dominic Crossan (1991, 310–13) argues for "an early miracles tradition" jointly embedded in Mark and John.

13. A quarter of a century ago, I attempted to evaluate the dominant theories then operating (see Carson 1978). By far the most comprehensive recent evaluation is that of Van Belle 1994.

Fourth Evangelist used sources, remain unconvinced that a Signs Source or other *Grundschrift* is recoverable.

These matters can be refracted through another set of disputed questions, namely, debates over the extent to which the Fourth Gospel can be thought of as a literary unity. The stronger the argument for literary unity, of course, the more tenuous are all claims to well-defined sources. Once again, however, the disagreements are considerable. The works of Eduard Schweizer (1965), Eugen Ruckstuhl and Peter Dschulnigg (1991), and others, which were given over to painstaking demonstration that the literary characteristics of John's Gospel are evenly distributed, that therefore the Fourth Gospel is a "seamless robe," and so the source theories of Bultmann and Fortna cannot be substantiated, have been challenged in a variety of ways. E. D. Freed and R. B. Hunt, in support of Fortna's Signs Source, draw attention to the relatively high numbers of *hapax legomena* in the signs narratives and the passion narrative, and they list other features that distinguish such narrative material from the discourses (Freed and Hunt 1975). But Gilbert Van Belle objects that the *hapax legomena* and other features have to do with the genre distinction between narrative and discourse, and likewise with the peculiar subjects treated within the narratives. They thus cannot be called upon to warrant the existence of a source (Van Belle 1994, 198–200). Taking something of a mediating position, Schnelle, while opposed to the detailed source theories of Bultmann and of Fortna, follows Nicol in observing that five miracle stories (2:1–12; 4:46–47, 50–54; 5:1–9; 6:16–21; 9:1–2, 6–7) contain only a few Johannine characteristics, and so these stories may be ascribed to John's tradition, even if the variation is insufficient to warrant some theory of distinguishable source (Schnelle 1987, 172–73; 1992, 155–56). Meanwhile, an array of studies has sought to demonstrate that various constructions display such an even distribution that a strong source theory like that of Fortna cannot be justified: the historic present (O'Rourke 1974), the principal conjunctions (Poythress 1984), expressions with double meaning (Richard 1985), and the phenomenon of parallelism (Ellis 1999). Elsewhere Van Belle has shown that the parenthetical asides are a mark of the Evangelist's style and cannot be said to support either sources or later redaction (Van Belle 1985).

In short, although scholars who think of John's Gospel as something close to a "seamless robe" are doubtless now in the majority, there is still no consensus. Moreover, even the most convincing arguments for the literary/stylistic unity of the Fourth Gospel do not *directly* address the matter of historical reliability. If well-defined sources can be reliably detected, then it becomes possible, in principle, to distinguish the theological and historical stances of those sources from the stances of the redaction, and hence of the final document; conversely, well-developed arguments for stylistic unity tend to limit that sort of reconstruction. Strictly speaking, however, such debates say nothing directly about the historical reliability of the putative sources (if they can be recovered), nor about the historical reliability of the final document under the assumption that such sources

*cannot* be recovered. All they do, in the latter case, is make it possible that the final document is not *necessarily* one additional step removed from the events they describe, an additional step identified with the putative sources. For as we shall see, many scholars are convinced that, whatever sources John may have used, not only are they not retrievable, but this impasse does nothing whatsoever to improve our ability to evaluate John's historical reliability. There are still too many other questions to consider: the genre of the document, its author, its historical claims compared with those of the Synoptic Gospels (whether or not there is any literary dependence between the Synoptics and John), and so forth. I shall shortly return to some of these questions. On the whole, those who hold to the literary unity of the Fourth Gospel and find themselves on the more "conservative" side of the spectrum over John's historical reliability are inclined to link the unity of the document with a reliable witness author (possibly, but not necessarily, John the apostle), thereby eliminating layers of warping tradition, while those who hold to the literary unity of the Fourth Gospel and find themselves on the more "liberal" side of the spectrum over John's historical reliability are inclined to link the unity of the document to the *distance* the Evangelist must have from the events, since he writes (or rewrites) everything in his own style and so cannot be relied upon to be a faithful witness to his own historical claims (however faithful he may be to a certain theological vision).

Another area of debate regarding the literary dependence of John's Gospel deserves at least a few lines, insofar as it touches on matters of historical reliability. This has to do with the appropriate background against which to understand the book, a subject that holds much less scholarly attention than it once did. Dodd's magnificent survey of the options half a century ago (Dodd 1953) now seems very dated, not only because little consideration was given to the Dead Sea Scrolls but also because only a few scholars today devote much time to arguing that John must be interpreted against the background of gnosis or Philo or apocalyptic or whatever. Certainly the circulation of the Dead Sea Scrolls changed the tide of scholarly opinion. Before their circulation, many thought of John as the most hellenized of the four canonical Gospels;<sup>14</sup> afterward, much greater space was left for dominant Jewish influence. Moreover, the trend toward recognizing that full-blown gnosis does not appear until the second century, plus the widespread recognition that Judaism and Hellenism penetrated each other to surprising degrees,<sup>15</sup> largely forced scholars to abandon the older habit of seeking one domi-

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14. Indeed, one of the reasons why the commentary of Hoskyns and Davey is so remarkable is that Hoskyns, writing when he did but under the influence of Adolf Schlatter, understood the Fourth Gospel against a Jewish background (Hoskyns 1947). See especially Markus Bockmuehl 2004, 3–13, esp. 7.

15. Here, of course, the seminal influence of Martin Hengel (1974) can scarcely be overstated.

nant background as the univocal explanation of Johannine categories. Inevitably, there were exceptions (Luise Schottroff 1970) and some attempts to mix categories that had previously been kept separate (e.g., Robert Allan Hill 1990). Further, as we shall see, the tides of scholarship turned toward reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community, so that the focus of the “background” was increasingly ecclesiastical, or focused on the interface between church and synagogue, rather than on some standard corpus. In short, the widespread recognition that Jewish literature is the most believable “background” to John has not, on the long run, ensured greater historical credibility for John. This may be the case among some more “conservative” scholars; among some more “liberal” scholars the same evidence has fed into the interplay of church and synagogue half a century and more after the events to which the book ostensibly refers.

## 1.2. HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND AUTHORSHIP

The more firmly one concludes that the evidence supports unity, the more important the question of authorship becomes. But in this area one can hardly imagine a greater spread of opinion than actually exists.

Some, of course, still hold that John the son of Zebedee is the author,<sup>16</sup> but they cheerfully admit that this is a minority position today. Precisely because they are in the minority, they probably engage the arguments of their opponents rather more than their opponents engage theirs; that may be simply a function of being in the minority. Many more scholars, bowing in part to the powerful external witness that makes John the son of Zebedee responsible in some sense for the Gospel that bears his name, think that the apostle serves as some kind of original source, whose work has been mediated by someone else,<sup>17</sup> perhaps also called John. But this “position” in fact hides an array of quite different positions—indeed, arrays of positions along several distinct axes. (1) Some see the contribution of John the son of Zebedee to be so significant that this stance is only a whisker from that which sees John the son of Zebedee as the (primary) author (e.g., Craig Keener); on the other end of the spectrum, the son of Zebedee’s contribution is so minimal and so masked by later theological reflection and the activity of the Evangelist that the apostle’s contribution cannot in any substantive way be delineated. It is merely acknowledged as a bare *das* (so the later Brown). Of course, there are numerous stopping points along the entire

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16. To mention but a few: H. P. V. Nunn 1952; F. F. Bruce 1978; Leon Morris 1969 and 1995; J. A. T. Robinson 1985; D. A. Carson 1991; Craig L. Blomberg 2001; Howard M. Jackman 1999; and Andreas J. Köstenberger 2004.

17. The scholars who align with this position are legion. To mention but a few: C. K. Barrett 1978; Rudolf Schnackenburg 1968–82; 1992; Raymond E. Brown 1966–70; 2003; Craig S. Keener 2003.

spectrum. (2) The possibility of another and later John, “John the elder,” serving as the Evangelist, turns finally on how one reads the words of Papias preserved in Eusebius. But that is another minefield; the literature on the Greek syntax, on the reliability of Eusebius in reporting Papias, and on the date of Eusebius has become voluminous. I have argued elsewhere that it is doubtful that Papias’s reference to the presbyter John refers to someone other than the son of Zebedee, but that is not the majority position (yet the issues of syntax and patristic credibility are rarely addressed in Johannine studies; having an extra “John” around is simply far too convenient to pass up). (3) The relationship between the Beloved Disciple and John—whether the initial John the son of Zebedee, if he had anything to do with the book, or a later John the presbyter, if he ever existed—is similarly disputed. For example, the later Brown thinks it impossible that the Beloved Disciple was the Evangelist (see Brown 1979, 178); by contrast, Brown’s last editor, Francis Moloney, thinks it quite possible that the Beloved Disciple was the Evangelist.<sup>18</sup> (4) Finally, while some scholars speak of two writers, the original John (son of Zebedee) and the Evangelist (perhaps also called John), many think of the latter as enmeshed in a “school” (Culpepper 1975) or “community” (Brown 1979). In other words, once again there is a wide range of opinion about the degree of school or community involvement in the production of this Gospel.

Beyond the few who think that John the son of Zebedee wrote the Fourth Gospel, and beyond the many who think that John the son of Zebedee had something to do with the Fourth Gospel, stand several other opinions regarding the authorship of this book. With slight variations, Martin Hengel and Richard Bauckham have independently proposed that “John” (viz., the Beloved Disciple) is in fact an eyewitness who was present at the Last Supper and at the cross but was not the son of Zebedee.<sup>19</sup> I confess this solution strikes me as having the same weaknesses as the traditional view but few of its strengths.<sup>20</sup> Many note that the Fourth Gospel is formally anonymous and leave it at that.<sup>21</sup> Marie-Émile Boismard argues that the author, but not the final redactor, is one of the two unnamed

18. See Moloney’s comments in Brown 2003 and Moloney 1998. Moloney consistently attempts to find a mediating position on matters of historicity: see, e.g., his essay: Moloney 2000a. See also John Painter 1993, 90–91.

19. Martin Hengel 1993; parts of this work are incorporated into his *The Johannine Question* (1989); and Richard Bauckham 1993. Jacques Winandy (1998) suggests that this John appears with Peter in Acts 1–8 and in Gal 2:9, and is the Beloved Disciple, yet he is not to be identified with the son of Zebedee but rather with the Jewish priest of Jerusalem mentioned by Polycrates (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.31.3; 5.29.3; cf. John 18:15–16).

20. I have interacted with it at some length in my forthcoming NIGTC commentary on the Johannine Epistles.

21. E.g., George R. Beasley-Murray 1987; Robert Kysar 1985, 2436–39; 1992, 919–20.

disciples in John 21.<sup>22</sup> Barnabas Lindars argues that we cannot construct a defensible argument for any particular author, so we must simply admit our ignorance, but he then argues that, rhetorically speaking, the Beloved Disciple is nothing more than a model of genuine discipleship—and this means “the Fourth Gospel can lay no claim to special historical reliability” (Lindars 1972, 34). Alternatively, a few people have suggested that Lazarus is the Beloved Disciple, primarily on the ground that John records that Jesus loved him (John 11:3),<sup>23</sup> and James Charlesworth (1995) has written an extensive argument on the Beloved Disciple’s being Thomas.

The most important observation to draw from this survey is the sheer diversity of the opinions that are defended in the literature.

### 1.3. HISTORICAL QUESTIONS, THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY, AND THEORIES OF A TWO-LEVEL DRAMA

Once again, I shall not survey the entire field but merely indicate something of the enormous diversity of opinion in this domain.

The heritage of source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, and redaction criticism taught us to try to untangle something of the historical matrix in which the canonical Gospels, including John, came into being. The best practitioners acknowledged that there was necessarily a fair bit of speculation involved: one recalls Brown’s assertion that he would be content if scholars came to accept 60 percent of his reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, reconstruction of the context of the Fourth Gospel’s writer, rather than the context of this Gospel’s ostensible subject, became a focal point for countless scholars. Doubtless the study that came to be viewed as seminal in the field is that of J. Louis Martyn (2003). The title, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, was more than a little tendentious: for most scholars, “history” in the Fourth Gospel had to do with the extent to which the Gospel gave reliable historical information about the matters it was apparently describing, namely, Jesus and his mission; “theology” had to do with the theological stance of the Evangelist and with the extent to which that theology somehow modified or even betrayed the historical claims. For Martyn, however, both the “history” and the “theology” had to do with the historical context in which the Gospel was ostensibly written: the church-synagogue conflict toward the end of the first century. This does not mean

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22. Marie-Émile Boismard (1998, 79) also dismisses Winandy’s thesis (1998) on the ground that it makes no sense to suppose that this John is a priest of Jerusalem when he is presented first as a disciple of the Baptist and living in his entourage (1:35ff.; 3:25).

23. E.g., Vernard Eller 1987; Basil S. Davis 2002; and, in measure, Luc Devillers 1997.

24. Raymond E. Brown 1982. I also recall the wry confession of David Clines, who, after his magisterial study on Pooh (1998) avowed that he could almost talk himself into believing his analysis and reconstruction were correct.

that in his analysis of John 9, Martyn thinks the text tells us *nothing* of the historical Jesus; he simply keeps speaking of a two-level drama. Nonetheless, almost all his attention, and virtually all of his confidence, rest with the Evangelist's situation being the 90s of the first century C.E. What Martyn thinks the text tells us of the historical Jesus is slight and is put forward with astonishing tentativeness.

Almost all the reviews were laudatory even while most of them criticized Martyn for the specificity of his reconstruction that seemed to outstrip the evidence. If two historians wrote the history of World War II, one writing around 1953 during the Eisenhower years, and another around 1993 during the Clinton administration, one would expect to find significant differences of perspective. The later writer, after all, would almost certainly be influenced in some way by Viet Nam. If a third historian wrote a history of World War II in 2003, after 9/11, doubtless the stance would be discernibly different again. But if all three were ostensibly writing about World War II, and still within memory of the longest-lived witnesses, one wonders how much detailed reconstruction of the different periods in which they actually wrote would be possible, especially if we had virtually no other source for 1953, 1993, and 2003 and were researching the matter about 4000 C.E. Still, having rapped Martyn's knuckles for being too specific, many scholars followed in his train with their own reconstructions. Commonly, noises are made about not denying that the text might also tell us something about the historical Jesus, but usually the center of attention has remained on the stance of the Evangelist or even the reconstruction of the Johannine community—on the second level of the two-level drama—so that questions about the historical Jesus have tended to be ignored rather than explored.<sup>25</sup> Many, many studies of John's themes, theology, and ethics could be lumped under this heading: a footnote that listed the most important of them since the first edition of Martyn's book appeared would, I suspect, be as long as this entire essay.

Even so, they are not all of a piece, so far as their stance toward the historical Jesus is concerned. They run the gamut from extreme hesitancy about any claim with respect to the historical Jesus to thoroughgoing confidence that we can uncover quite a bit about the historical Jesus from John's Gospel. More recently, the debate has been muddied (or deepened, depending on one's point of view) by four further interests that contribute to this subject, sometimes directly, sometimes rather tangentially.

*First*, the substantial growth in literary and rhetorical criticism, a growth that has left nothing in the field of New Testament studies untouched, has inevitably left its mark on the study of John. Although there have long been analyses of literary devices found in the Fourth Gospel,<sup>26</sup> the important change took place

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25. To take the example of just one scholar, see Adele Reinhartz 1989 and 2001.

26. E.g., David W. Wead 1970; Paul D. Duke 1985.



when some writers approached some part of this Gospel,<sup>27</sup> or the whole of it, asking exclusively literary-critical questions.<sup>28</sup> There is no *necessary* entailment from many literary-critical studies to questions of historicity. Indeed, one of the transitional figures, Birgir Olsson, has managed to produce both a major literary-critical analysis (1974) and his own detailed reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community (1987; although the historicity of what the text says about Jesus is another subject). Although most of these literary critics insist their work says very little, whether positive or negative, about the historical value of the text, the asseveration strikes the attentive reader as a shade artificial; this for at least three reasons: (1) Many details in the text that in the past were taken as pointers to the historical situation envisaged by the author are now taken as pointers to the literary situation *and nothing more*. For instance, the three mentions of Passover (2:23; 6:4; 12:1) have in the past been fodder for substantial disputes on the length of the ministry of the historical Jesus, yet in Culpepper they are references to “narrative time” (1983, 70). Moreover, since Culpepper’s controlling paradigm is the nineteenth-century English novel, a *fictive* genre, it is difficult to avoid seeing a chasm opening up between elements in the text and historical referents. (2) Even for those literary critics who attempt a tighter connection between the literary art of the Fourth Gospel and historical realities, their interest lies overwhelmingly in the re-creation of the historical context of the Johannine community at the end of the first century, not in assessment of what may be known about the historical Jesus. For instance, the recent work of Willis Salier investigates the power of the term *σημεία*, both within the rhetorical strategy of the Gospel *and within the world of the re-created audience* (Salier 2004). Tom Thatcher proposes to revamp traditional critical approaches to the Fourth Gospel by making primary his appeal to “riddles” (Thatcher 2000), but quite apart from whether or not he has put too much weight on merely *one* literary phenomenon in the Gospel, what is striking is that in his efforts to transform the literary-critical use of form criticism by appeal to his reconstruction of the rhetorical situation, he leaves utterly unchanged the more-or-less standard sectarian interpretation of the book. So the “historical” focus is on the second tier of the two-level drama, with scarcely any space left for considering the *ostensible* historical level set forth by the text itself. (3) Some (but not all) of these literary-critical studies are tied, in their authors’ minds, to the shift toward the postmodern, in which texts cannot be expected to tell us anything certain outside the world of the text itself—that is, extratextual referentiality is largely eliminated.<sup>29</sup> I shall comment a little more on postmodern contributions to this debate in a few moments.

*Second*, developments in social-scientific interpretation, once more impact-

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27. In particular, Birgir Olsson 1974.

28. Notably R. Alan Culpepper 1983.

29. For a general introduction to this approach, see Edgar V. McKnight 1988.



ing the entire field of New Testament research, have made their impression on Johannine studies. Taking its models, perspectives, and theories from the social sciences, this approach analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the world presented in the text.<sup>30</sup> In reality, this approach is not one but many; so diverse are its methods and results that it is difficult to make brief generalizing comments about them without appearing reductionistic. One might have thought that such approaches would make substantial contributions to discussions of historical matters, precisely because social and cultural dimensions are the very stuff of the historical matrix. Yet this is not always the case. For a start, many of these discussions of the social and cultural dynamics—the bearing of a shame culture in John 9, for instance, or common expectations regarding weddings and their bearing on John 2—describe what takes place “in antiquity,” a phrase often repeated but scarcely calculated to enhance historical precision. More importantly, most of these approaches focus on the re-created Johannine community. In other words, the social-scientific tools are commonly deployed on the community that the scholars presuppose lies behind the text and that they think they can further explain and define by appealing to their own models and tools. Very little of this work has much bearing on research into the historical Jesus.

One of the assumptions common to much of this work is that John’s community, toward the end of the first century, is sectarian. Not a little of its social-scientific profile turns on that assumption. I am far from convinced that, applied to the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, this is an unambiguous and therefore useful category. I shall say more about this at the end of this essay, but the topic is in fact crying out for more substantive reassessment. Meanwhile, I cannot help but notice that, from another perspective, at least one scholar rejects the category of “sect” applied to this re-created community, arguing for the superiority of “cult” (Fuglseth 2002).

*Third*, the current spate of literature on ostensible anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel<sup>31</sup> plays its own role in debates over the historical Jesus and the dehistoricizing of the Gospel of John. Scholars are divided about how useful the category of “anti-Judaizing” is when applied to the re-created Johannine community, but obviously it becomes more powerful in proportion to the degree one thinks of this community as predominantly Gentile. It seems slightly silly to apply it to a Jew like Jesus, who is no more and no less “anti-Judaizing” than, say, 1QS and 1QM, or, with a slight change in vocabulary, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos. In other

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30. See, inter alia, Bruce J. Malina 1985; Jerome H. Neyrey 1988; David Rensberger 1988; Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh 1998.

31. Representative studies from the considerable literature include Ludger Schenke 1988; George M. Smiga 1992; Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner 1993; Pierre Grelot 1995; Stephen Motyer 1997; Urban C. von Wahlde 2000; Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001; Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001.

words, there is internal pressure to focus on the Johannine community as a means of accounting for the Johannine adversarial presentation of Jesus and religious leaders. Understandably, the impetus for the current studies stems in no small degree from sober reflection on the Holocaust. As admirable as these moral commitments are, the danger of serious anachronism at the level of *historical* inquiry is overwhelming. In any case, the assumptions of the “two-level” approach to the Fourth Gospel tend to be indirectly affirmed by such study, primarily because it is widely assumed that we have easy access to the life and thought of the end-of-first-century Johannine community.

*Fourth*, a small but burgeoning group of scholars is calling the entire structure of the two-level drama into question. Some studies do not set out to overthrow the approach in its entirety but reject the “standard” models. Wendy Sproston North, for instance, criticizes the influential work of Raymond Brown, who traces out the history of the Johannine community in large part by arguing that virtually every unit of 1 John reflects self-conscious dependence on the Fourth Gospel, clarifying and reshaping the Gospel’s instruction to ward off the influences and the perceived distortions of the secessionists. Sproston North (2001) argues that Brown’s argument is circular and advances her own theory that both John and 1 John spring from the same tradition. Unfortunately, she provides no convincing criteria to distinguish between her theory that common language indicates common tradition and Brown’s theory that the degree of common language indicates dependence; the same data could be deployed to support either hypothesis. In any case, all two-level theories demand some assumptions about our ability to re-create the history of the Johannine community, and the dominant influence of Martyn and Brown is beginning to be questioned.

Some scholars are far more sweeping in their questioning than Sproston North. Tobias Hägerland (2003) argues that there is no parallel in antiquity to the two-level drama Martyn thinks he sees in the Fourth Gospel, and he argues that a sober reading of the narrative parts of the Fourth Gospel gives no hint of a desire to lay out a history of the Johannine community. In a still more sweeping attack on the Johannine community, Bauckham and his colleagues have argued that the canonical Gospels were intended for a much wider circulation than hermetically sealed communities associated with a “Matthew” or “Mark” or “Luke” or “John” (Bauckham 1998a). The topic is too complex to be addressed in detail here, but I am inclined to think that the principal *negative* thesis of Bauckham’s book is largely correct (i.e., that the canonical Gospels were *not* intended to be read by discrete and rather separate individual communities) but that some of his *positive* theses are more doubtful. The view that all four canonical Gospels were written primarily for the widest possible *Christian* audience needs more testing. In particular, Bauckham’s second contribution in the book (Bauckham 1998b) isolates evidence that he thinks supports the view that John’s intended readers had read Mark and that John was therefore writing not for an ostensible “Johannine community” but for those already familiar with Mark’s Gospel, and

thus for wide circulation among the churches. The response of Sproston North (2003) is largely convincing—but of course it does not address the possibility that John's Gospel was written primarily with evangelistic purposes in mind.

Indeed, that comment crystallizes another nest of questions that have in the past decade received only brief exploration: Precisely *why* was the Fourth Gospel written? I confess I remain part of the small but unrepentant band of those who think that the primary purpose of the Fourth Gospel was the evangelization of Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers in the Diaspora.<sup>32</sup> But while this is today very much a minority report, when linked with the broader number of minority stances now joined together in their criticism of the schema of the two-level drama, the disarray becomes palpable.

Meanwhile, there are other reasons for doubting that the Evangelist intended to write a two-level narrative. It is often said that he writes from the theological perspective of the end of the first century. At one level, that is a mere truism. But one of the most striking features of the Gospel is regularly overlooked: John repeatedly—no less than sixteen times, from 2:22 to 20:9—explicitly distinguishes between what the disciples understood “back then,” during the life and times of Jesus, and what they came to understand *later*, only after his resurrection (see Carson 1982b). These “misunderstandings” are often treated as merely rhetorical devices, with little to say about the author's historical perspective. But tied as they are to the theme of witness, these “misunderstandings” constitute a special subcategory of the even larger number of misunderstandings in his entire Gospel: they are misunderstandings (or failures to understand) that are resolved *by the passage of time*—in particular, by the insight gained only *after* the resurrection. In short, they constitute explicit evidence of the author's consciousness of the historical dimensions of his witness, and his steadfast refusal to grant the disciples a greater understanding—at any point in their pilgrimage—than they actually had. A case could be made that all the canonical Gospel writers display at least a modicum of this awareness (Carson 1982a), but John displays it in spades, and it sits ill with the opinion of those who hold that John blurs the distinction between his own time and the time of Jesus in order to create a two-level drama. The hard literary evidence establishes that John is not only *capable* of making the temporal distinction but that he *insists* on it.

These four areas, then—literary and rhetorical criticism, social-scientific criticism, literature wrestling with perceived anti-Judaism, and fundamental attacks on the entire hypothesis of a two-level drama in John—have all made their contribution to the debate on John's community. In particular, for our purposes they add to the complexity and diversity of opinion regarding the extent

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32. In 1987 I published an essay on the purpose of the Fourth Gospel that attempted to address one small part of that debate. Reaction was mixed, but the most trenchant criticism came from Gordon D. Fee (1992). It reappears in the third collection of Fee's essays, and his essay has been widely influential. I confess I find his arguments unconvincing (Carson 2005).

to which we can re-create the Johannine community and the extent to which the Gospel itself preserves a two-level drama, both of which issues have a fundamental bearing on how we go about evaluating this Gospel for any contribution it may make to our understanding of the life and times of the historical Jesus.

#### 1.4. HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND A MISCELLANY OF TOPICS

So as not to prolong this discussion unduly, I shall under this heading include only brief comments on a variety of topics that testify, sometimes rather obliquely, to the diversity of stances on the historical value of John's Gospel. These topics are of various degrees of importance, and in no particular order.

(1) Many scholars agree that the nub of the problem of establishing John's usefulness as a witness to the historical Jesus is the well-known array of differences—in vocabulary, emphasis, detail, and theology—between this Gospel and the Synoptics. But what is to be made of the differences varies from scholar to scholar. Listing some of these differences, C. M. Tuckett concludes that it is difficult to take both John and the Synoptics as “equally accurate reflections of the historical Jesus” (Tuckett 2001), and for various reasons he leans toward the latter. Geza Vermes thinks that John's Gospel reflects (and contributes to) “the de-Judaization of the pristine gospel in the Greco-Roman world” and in consequence thinks John can play no role in any serious exploration of the historical Jesus (Vermes 1993, 213). By contrast, Craig Blomberg, no less than the others, sees the differences between John and the Synoptics as “the real heart of the problem” (Blomberg 2001, 73) but attempts to lay out how they overlap and mutually support each other in credible ways. Elsewhere, over against Vermes, he ploughs an old but oft-forgotten furrow by showing how Jewish and how early are so many of John's themes (Blomberg 2002, 71–75). Similarly, Keener, while acknowledging that “John adapts his material more freely than any of the Synoptics,” nevertheless argues that the small degree of overlap with the Synoptics “makes the degree of his adaptation difficult to examine” (Keener 2003, 1:xxvii). Further, considerations of genre and the Gospel's transparent dependence, to some significant degree, on eyewitness testimony tip the burden of proof “onto those who deny John's use of tradition for the events he describes,” even though “the historical method cannot check the accuracy of most of his individual details” (Keener 2003, 1:51–52). In short, once again the raw data lead different groups of scholars in radically different directions.

(2) Continuing debate rages over whether “history” and “theology” ought to be pitted against each other in anyone's attempt to delineate what is historical in the Fourth Gospel. For instance, at one end of the spectrum, Maurice Casey argues that the Christology of the Fourth Gospel is so “high” that it amounts to an “identity change”: the Johannine community broke its connections with its Jewish antecedents and ended up with the unthinkable, that God became incarnate in the man Jesus. This theology of the Gospel is so extraordinary that its

historical claims must be ruled out of court. Indeed, John's Gospel is not only historically inaccurate but opposed to all other New Testament christological affirmations. The Johannine community de-historicized itself by abandoning its roots, so the legacy of its chief "historical" document is null.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, many scholars, as we have seen, find John to be the *most* Jewish of the canonical Gospels, while others think that the Fourth Gospel was written when the Johannine community was in fairly close contact with the synagogue; small wonder that some of Casey's reviewers were trenchant (Leander Keck 1993). Be that as it may, one thing that stands out in Casey's work is the way he pits history against theology. By contrast, Marianne Meye Thompson (1996) constantly endeavors to show the ways in which history and theology should *not* be pitted against each other. Another of her works points out that, despite John's "high" Christology, no other Gospel is as unyielding in its insistence on Jesus' absolute dependence on God (1988).

In any case, the approach to the relationship between history and theology is very different in these two authors. There are of course innumerable intermediate positions, all of them having a bearing on one's assessment of the Fourth Gospel's historical value. In the extreme case, one wonders if, when the bifurcation between the two becomes absolute, the real agenda is antisupernaturalism, in which case the argument is foreclosed and the sifting of evidence a waste of time.

(3) While many Johannine scholars continue to seek to demonstrate or debunk the historical value of the Gospel of John—that is, its value as witness to positive history—a new generation, influenced by the turn to the subject and by the tide of postmodern epistemology, not only denies the possibility of knowing anything of a "positivistic" past but glories in the diversity of interpretations. After all, this diversity testifies to the freedom of the human spirit and the diversity of perspectives that different readers bring to the interpretive enterprise. In the strongest form of the postmodern approach, "history" no longer refers both to "what happened" and to subsequent efforts to relate what happened. On the contrary, "history" is always the narrative; it is inevitably an interpretation of events to which we have no direct access. In that sense, all histories "are fictional narratives saturated with the ideological stances of the authors."<sup>34</sup> The historian's task is to write "narrative truth" that may be assessed by various canons of aesthetics but that cannot be assessed by faithfulness to "what happened," since we have no access to "what happened" except through the "histories" themselves. The modernist penchant for writing sweeping "histories" that sought to explain the past was merely an exercise in control, in "totalization" (a term made famous by Michel Foucault): the era of the all-embracing meta-narrative is dead. We are left with the fruit of our exegetical biases and practices, with many little stories

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33. Maurice Casey 1991; see further Casey 1996. Similarly, cf. Stephen J. Patterson 1998.

34. Fred W. Burnett 2000, 107. See also Bernard C. Lategan 2003.

that enable us to communicate, in some measure, with one another—but none of these little stories has any useful or verifiable extratextual referentiality.<sup>35</sup>

Although many Johannine scholars have appealed to some element or other of postmodern thought, the two who have most consistently worked out of this framework are probably Jeffrey Staley and Colleen Conway. Staley argues that every interpretation of the origin of the Fourth Gospel is inevitably laden with ideology, that none can be authoritative, and that the pursuit of a positivistic historical Jesus is the pursuit of a chimera. What postmodern approaches “add” to the debate on the “historical” locatedness of the Gospel is a greater awareness of ideology (Staley 2001). Small wonder, then, that in his book, nominally on John, Staley (1995) playfully explores rhetoric in John, his own personal history, and the “American West”—consistently working out of the framework of a “hard”<sup>36</sup> postmodern approach to reader-response criticism. For her part, Conway’s growing *oeuvre*<sup>37</sup> explains what the “new historicism” is about and tries to show “how particular readings of the Gospel are generated by and participate in the complex ‘textualized universe’ at any given moment, thereby contributing to the management of reality” (2002, 494).

Once again, then, the gamut is huge: from those still pursuing positivistic history, whether of the Johannine community or of the historical Jesus, to a fully postmodern approach issuing in the “new historicism.”

(4) A very wide range of Johannine themes, textual features, or approaches to John either presuppose or contribute something with respect to the historical value of John. I mention a handful, the merest sample, to illustrate the sort of thing I have in mind. One recent study of John’s Christology pays careful attention to both literary and historical questions raised by John 7–10, to argue that the Feast of Booths shapes the presentation of Jesus as “the emissary” in these chapters and that most scholars have underestimated the role of Isaiah in *Lives of the Prophets*, which influenced the details of the water rites, not to say the descriptions of the Pool of Siloam and the Spring of Gihon. All of this leads to detailed evaluation of the controversies John’s community was engaged in at the end of the first century, but with little attempt to wrestle with what bearing these reflections may have on the historical Jesus (Devillers 2002). The magisterial work on eschatology by Jörg Frey touches almost every area of Johannine exegesis and interpretation in the twentieth century and is especially powerful in illuminating the extent to which ideological presuppositions have domesticated careful

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35. Doubtless the contemporary scholar who has done as much as anyone to expound this approach to our task is A. K. M. Adam. From his growing list of works, see especially Adam 1995a; 1995b; 2000; 2001.

36. On the distinction between “hard” and “soft” postmodernism, see the final section of this paper.

37. In particular, see Colleen M. Conway 2002. See also her paper in this collection.

exegesis<sup>38</sup>—but ultimately his multilayered and largely convincing reconstruction of Johannine eschatology has much more to do with the Fourth Evangelist than with Jesus. Alexander Jensen's 2004 work on the early Christian struggle for language suitable to early Christian experience is challenging and creative, but it depends on highly disputed re-creations of the Johannine community and its interaction with Judaism, and it contributes nothing to discussion of the historical Jesus (except negatively, and all by implication). Of course, there are many studies that in their descriptions of phenomena in the text of the Fourth Gospel are remarkably helpful and insightful (such as W. Kraus's 1997 essay on how this Gospel uses the Old Testament, if I am to pick one arbitrary example), without any reflection on what this may say about the author, his community, or the historical Jesus whom the Evangelist is ostensibly describing.

The burgeoning feminist literature on John is now making contributions to the historical questions in a wide diversity of ways. On the more modest side, Margaret Beirne's 2003 study of "Johannine pairs" is first and foremost a literary analysis, so that her own methodological limitations permit her to do no more than speculate as to whether her *narrative* conclusions may be grounded in the *historical* situation of the Johannine community. Less modest is the suggestion of Sandra Schneiders (1998) that the most likely candidate for the Evangelist's "textual alter ego," the figure or figures embodied in the Beloved Disciple and responsible for the eyewitness testimony on which the corporate authority of the Johannine community rests, is the Samaritan woman. Quite apart from the plausibility of this thesis in itself, Schneiders does not test it against the internal and very substantial patristic evidence of a rather different figure embodied in the Beloved Disciple. A study of one well-defined feature in John's Gospel may have as one of its purposes the assessment of that feature's credibility—such as Peter W. Ensor's 1996 study of Jesus' "works"-sayings, where he plausibly argues that these sayings are at very least highly likely to be "traditional" (which, he judges, nudges them toward the "historical" or "authentic" end of the spectrum).<sup>39</sup> Still others

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38. Jörg Frey 1997, 1998, 2000a. See especially 2000a, 175: "Daß die Erwartung einer postmortal-jenseitigen Heilszukunft vom vierten Evangelisten selbst bestritten worden sei, konnte erst auf der Basis jener idealistischen und spiritualistischen Tradition der Johannesexegese behauptet werden, welche alle 'äußerlichen' Ereignisse—Ostern und Parusie—in der Präsenz des Geistes verinnerlicht und die traditionellen Zukunftshoffnungen in der Gegenwart, im 'seligen Haben' aufgenommen wissen wollte. In diesem Blickwinkel konnte dann die im vierten Evangelium erkannte Tendenz der Interpretation als Vorbild seiner neuzeitlichen Interpreten erscheinen. Die Konsequenz, in der man das Werk des Evangelisten nun im spiritualistischen oder im existentialtheologischen Sinn interpretierte, mußte einerseits die literarkritische Ausscheidung einer Vielzahl 'störender' Textelemente und andererseits das Postulat einer vom Evangelisten selbst praktizierten 'kritischen Umdeutung' seiner apokalyptisch-realistischen und futurisch-eschatologischen Tradition nach sich ziehen."

39. At a more popular level, see David Wenham 1998.



survey the “new departures” in recent Johannine research, weaving them into an assessment of the state of play, including their bearings on historical questions (e.g., Klaus Scholtissek 2002).

(5) Almost all Johannine scholars who address the issue (except Martin Hengel) presuppose or actually argue that John’s Gospel was not held in high repute in the early church until the time of Irenaeus (who used it to advantage in his *Against Heresies*) and that by contrast it was widely used by gnostics (everyone mentions that the first commentary on John of which we know anything is that of Heracleon). How much this set of assumptions has influenced contemporary assessments of John’s value as an historical document is harder to assess: the evidence, I think, is rather contradictory. Even so, the recent work by Charles E. Hill (2004) is “must reading” on this subject. In detailed study of the primary sources, Hill convincingly debunks what he calls the OJP, the “orthodox Johannophobia paradigm.” Insofar as this now discredited paradigm has played back into skepticism about John’s value as a source for history, the issue, for our purposes, is worth revisiting.

So much for this potted survey of recent and current research on the Fourth Gospel, insofar as it bears on historical questions.

## 2. THE PROBLEM

To bring this rather scattered description together, it may be helpful to crystallize the problem in five steps.

(1) The survey of the literature shows remarkable diversity in methods, tools, approaches, presuppositions, epistemology, and results—extending even to what we think “history” is, as an antecedent question to whether or not John is “historically” reliable. Very often the diverse stances adopted by some particular investigator interlock in startling ways. Inevitably this means that the actual data on some subset of the question are treated very differently by different scholars, since they have already made up their minds on a substantial range of related questions. It also means that serious discussion by two scholars about some narrow but well-delineated phenomenon in the text soon embroils both of them in massive issues not easily resolved by an intimate chat over a cup of tea.

(2) In current study of John’s Gospel, no single approach exercises anything like hegemonic control over the entire discipline. Contrast this reality with the field of Pauline studies. At least in the English-speaking world, the so-called “new perspective on Paul” has largely controlled the discussion of the last three decades. A few notable figures have demurred, of course, but virtually no one could write something substantial on any part of the Pauline corpus without acknowledging the new perspective. That hegemonic control has drifted into the Scandinavian world but has left the German world largely unscathed. More to the point, in academic discussion it is now being widely assaulted; the new perspective on Paul is rapidly dissipating. Ironically, at the more popular level of seminary and church



influence, far from being on the wane, it is probably still increasing. But nothing like this is happening in the field of Johannine studies. Some voices are more influential than others, of course, but no “perspective” exercises anything like hegemonic control.

(3) By the same token, no Kuhnian “paradigm shift” in Johannine studies is possible. Indeed, it is doubtful if such paradigm-shifting terminology is even the best way to think about developments in the humanities,<sup>40</sup> including biblical studies.<sup>41</sup> By and large, when a new literary tool or approach comes along, it is adopted by a certain percentage of the guild and for a period of time receives disproportionate praise and elicits underserved promise from those enamored of it, while it is largely ignored by everyone else. In the course of time, that tool has a very good chance of settling down to become one of the many tools or approaches that Johannine scholars have at their disposal. Gushing superlatives wane, but general acceptance more than compensates for the loss of focused enthusiasm. In short, new specialisms or new foci of interest introduce new streams into the big mix of this strange thing called “Johannine studies” without ever taking over the whole show or stilling all the older questions raised by earlier generations of scholars.

(4) My title, however, goes beyond the transparent diversity in the field of Johannine studies, to speak of the balkanization of the discipline. After submitting the title to this SBL Group’s organizers, I stumbled upon analogous usage in Richard Horsley, who speaks of the “balkanization of ‘criticism’ and interpretations, and ... partial orientations midst a general disorientation in Gospel studies” (Horsley 2003). Writing from a perspective rather more self-consciously indebted to postmodernism than my own, he appears to think that this balkanization in Gospel studies is by and large a good thing. But whether good or bad, I must attempt to be a little clearer.

What I mean is that, although one can find just about every conceivable opinion and combination of opinions in the field of Johannine studies as a whole,<sup>42</sup> there are now clumps of opinions and approaches that regularly talk past one another. Those who are assessing whether some element or other in the Fourth Gospel is “historical” in that it “happened” largely ignore the writings in support of the new historicism; the postmoderns have little to do with assessing historical evidence, other than to keep asserting that it is all driven by ideology. Countless literary studies treat the text as if it were divorced from history, despite the text’s

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40. See the thoughtful essay of Robert F. Shedinger 2000.

41. The most careful historians of science are aware of the limitations of Kuhnian theory in the field of the hard sciences, too—but that is another and rather complex subject. See, for a start, Frederick Suppe 1977; Gary Gutting 1980.

42. I am tempted to ask, partly out of sheer perversity and partly as illustrative of this fascinating range of combinations, whether J. A. T. Robinson should be considered a liberal or a conservative.

historical pretensions; a residue of scholars keep probing for sources and seams to find out what happened “below” the surface of the text. Those who think that the history of the Johannine community can be read off the Gospel of John continue to build on or modify the theories of their predecessors, while those who think that all “two-level drama” approaches are exegetically unwarranted write off the work of the Johannine community specialists as little more than castles in the air. Even our respective filters about what could have happened, or what likely happened, in the life of the first-century Jesus, vary from the antisupernaturalism of philosophical materialism through assorted expectations of what a Jew like Jesus *could* have said, through various readings of antecedent Jewish and other materials to explain what the texts tell us he said, through to the assumption that classic Christian confessionalism is historically well-grounded. It is highly unlikely that scholars sporting such different filters will read the evidence in the same way. When such filters are the issue, debates of a minor methodological nature are unlikely to be productive. In some domains, of course, there is actual *engagement* of different opinions (e.g., whether or not John is in some sense dependent on one or more of the Synoptic Gospels), but in many others, groups of scholars continue the discussion by talking past one another.

Part of this balkanization stems from the drift toward more and more specializations (not every well-trained expert in text linguistics knows much about the primary sources of first-century Judaism or the history of Johannine scholarship; not every expert in source criticism is equally adept at literary theory; and most experts in the new historicism do not seem interested in anything except the new historicism). True, new approaches have sometimes spawned fresh insight. On the other hand, it is very easy for each subdiscipline to proceed as if the rest of the field is only a rumor, (barely) acknowledging the existence of other subdisciplines in polite asides but tending not to interact with them. This kind of diversity makes the field of Johannine studies fascinating, and we certainly (as mentioned above) have avoided the hegemonic control of a single disciplinary tradition. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid entertaining the suspicion that the larger discipline is in some disarray: as in the period of the judges, we all do what is right in our own eyes.

Perhaps this balkanization owes something to the way in which many doctoral dissertations are written: the student is urged, for the sake of methodological rigor, to hold all other considerations to one side while focusing exclusively on one narrow theme or tool, with the result being an almost inevitable distortion. For example, is a focus on “ingesting” the best way to understand the mind of the Evangelist as he has committed himself to writing?<sup>43</sup>

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43. Jane S. Webster 2003. Cf. the comment of Luke Timothy Johnson 1996, 73: “Although the actual database for biblical studies is relatively small, the volume of secondary literature produced over the last two thousand years—in geometric increase over the past thirty years—

Even in the context of this SBL Group, although the various contributors are writing on one aspect or another of the matters surrounding the historicity of John's Gospel, I doubt if the nature of the presentations changes many minds, especially the minds of the presenters. We all say our piece, the cordiality of the discussion is encouraging, and the papers are informative of their respective author's position. But the format does not mean that we really *engage*. This is in no way a criticism of the organizers; it is simply a fair description of what takes place in this sort of forum. It is a reflection of Hengel's assertion that we live "in a time of widespread methodological confusion in the exegesis of John" (Hengel 1989, 87). It is striking that Kealy's impressive two-volume history of the interpretation of John's Gospel, to which I have already referred (Kealy 2002), welcomes all the newer methods as useful correctives (although he demurs from the postmodern claims that the text can support an infinite variety of readings) but does not begin to set forth a path through the methodological confusion, other than to assert that we must remember the perspectives and approaches of the past.

### 3. SOME SUGGESTIONS

Because many have observed the disarray (or even balkanization), it is not surprising that various suggestions have been made.

For instance, in one of his essays, Stephen Motyer surveys attempts by such scholars as Mark Stibbe and Martinus de Boer to resolve the impasse in Johannine studies between synchronic interpretations (largely literary-critical and especially narrative-critical) and diachronic interpretations (largely historical-critical). Motyer (1997a) advances two arguments, one from speech-act theory and the other from the notion of "ownership," to encourage a meeting of minds between these two polarities. Even he acknowledges, however, that proponents of the narrative-critical approaches will have to acknowledge that the Fourth Gospel itself makes an irreducible historical claim. Mark Matson (2002) makes a more sweeping suggestion. He wants to expose and abandon what he judges to be false dichotomies in Gospel studies: John versus the Synoptics, historical-critical versus literary approaches (thus echoing Motyer), modernist versus postmodernist standpoints, and what he calls a critical stance over against a faith perspective. Certainly there is something to be said for each of his suggestions, but his discussion is so brief and nonspecific that it is unlikely to carry much weight.

In any case, I shall venture a few suggestions myself, understanding full well that none of them will be accepted by everyone, that each of them will be rejected

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forces scholars into absurdly narrow specializations: dissertations are written on aspects of the hypothetical document Q, for example, or on a set of verses from the Gospel of John, with no reference to a larger world of meaning."

by someone, and that there is at least some danger that all of them together will be accepted by no one. So with that cheerful thought:

(1) On the postmodern front, I have elsewhere suggested that it is essential to distinguish between “soft” postmodernism and “hard” postmodernism. Here I add that we must also distinguish between a “soft” new historicism and a “hard” new historicism. Soft postmodernism acknowledges that all human knowing is necessarily culture-laden knowing (after all, language itself is a cultural artifact) and that our finiteness guarantees that all seeing, all interpretation, is necessarily perspectival. Hard postmodernism makes the same observations and then infers that therefore all knowledge of objective extratextual reality is a chimera. Soft new historicism recognizes that all “historical” knowledge is necessarily perspectival and tied to text and artifact; hard new historicism infers that therefore we have no knowledge of the objective past.

In fact, there is a subtle new ingredient that hard postmodernism smuggles into the analysis. The hard new historians will agree that we could have knowledge of the objective past *only* if our knowledge of the past could be unmediated and nonperspectival. But for those conditions to exist, we would have to be God. To set the bar so high is to demand that we enjoy omniscience if we are to have any knowledge of the objective past. Well, fair enough: if that is the standard of what it means to have “knowledge,” then only God can have it. Of course, in that case the position (as has often been pointed out) is self-refuting, for only God has that kind of knowledge of postmodern claims. On the other hand, if we allow that there are useful and meaningful ways to speak of human knowledge, including human knowledge of the past—ways that make no pretensions of omniscience—it is difficult to see why we should abandon all possibilities of knowing objective truth about the past. We merely need to recognize that even when we claim to have knowledge of something objective in the past, (a) we are not claiming that our way of knowing it is utterly objective, that is, nonperspectival; and (b) we are not claiming that our “knowledge” of that objective past is omniscient. Our knowledge may be *psychologically* “certain,” but that does not mean it is omniscient knowledge.

Transparently, our access to the past depends on witness of various kinds. That means our degree of certainty about putative events in the past will vary with the number, credibility, record, and circumstances of those witnesses. What we must see, I think, is that Christianity in the first century claimed to turn on events that (Christians claimed) actually happened. Consider, for example, the apostle Paul’s argument about the resurrection in 1 Cor 15. To make his point, he teases out the implications of the postulate that Jesus did *not* rise from the dead. He lists several: (a) The apostles are liars. In other words, Christians have access to this event through the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then either the witnesses were deluded or (in the apostle’s estimate) deceivers. (b) We remain in our trespasses and sins. The assumption, of course, is that the other elements of the apostle’s worldview, based on his under-

standing of Scripture, remain in place. Our sin has alienated us from God. If we believe that Jesus has died for our sin, and his sacrifice on our behalf has been acceptable to God as confirmed by the vindication of Jesus in his resurrection, we enjoy a certain confidence before God. Conversely, if Jesus has not risen from the dead, there is no reason to think he was vindicated—and in that case, there is no reason to think that his death has reconciled us to God. We remain in our trespasses and sins. (c) Our faith is in vain. In other words, the validity of Christian faith in the resurrection of Jesus turns on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. Faith is *more* than believing what is true, of course, but it is never *less*: certainly Paul does not encourage us to believe what he judges to be *not* true. Nor does he encourage faith in an object the truth of which he cannot speak. Faith's validity turns, in part, on the truthfulness of faith's object. That is also why, for Paul, faith is enhanced by speaking the truth. (d) We are of all people most to be pitied, if in fact we believe what is not true. Paul does not belong to the camp of those who think that faith's vindication lies in the psychological (spiritual?) help it provides to the believers, regardless of whether or not faith's object is valid. If we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, when in fact he did not rise from the dead, Paul thinks we are not to be commended, but pitied.

What does all this have to do with our consideration of John? These arguments from Paul are not teased out the same way in John's Gospel, of course, but the logical connection between John 20:29 and 20:30–31 must not be overlooked. Thomas has seen the resurrected Jesus and believed; those who do not see and yet believe are said to be blessed—but not because they have opted for faith without evidence or the like, still less an object of faith that is not true. Rather, the resurrected Jesus envisages the people who will come to faith even though they have never personally seen him. They will have become convinced that he returned from the dead in the way that we have access to other realities from the past: through witnesses, including Thomas, whose testimony becomes part of the written record “recorded in this book . . . that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:30–31).<sup>44</sup>

None of this suggests the belief that is blessed in 20:29–31 is belief in a mere datum to which we have access by purely neutral and objective means. Soft postmodernism is right: we have access to past events only through witnesses (including the texts and artifacts human witnesses leave behind), and no witness enjoys the stance of omniscience. Granted the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas's witness was scarcely neutral or clinical; indeed, had it been so, it would have been profane. To pit theological commitment against reliable witness is to demand the impossible: we are all “theologically” committed in some sense or other. Thus

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44. This is not to deny that John understands there are other elements, beyond witness, that play their role in a person's coming to believe, including the role of the Paraclete.

if the only kind of “historical record” we will admit to the table as transmitting something that “really happened” in the past is the one that is as uncommitted as we can imagine, then granted the nature of the things we are investigating, we are demanding not only the epistemologically impossible but the religiously profane. The “facts” of history cannot be had without “interpretation.” But against the hard postmodernists, this does *not* mean that there are no facts or that we cannot have access to them.

My suspicion is that at least part of our impasse springs from impossible criteria advanced by the defenders of positivistic history and impossible barriers advanced by the hard postmodernists. Intriguingly, this point has been raised in other categories by the best of an earlier generation of “modernist” Johannine scholars.<sup>45</sup>

(2) Approaches labeled “social-scientific” are of various sorts, and they should not all receive the same respect. At the risk of a generalization, they can be broken down into two groups (although at times the overlap is considerable): those that uncover what might be called the social and cultural history in which our New Testament texts are embedded; and those that analyze what is apparently going on in the community behind the text by recourse to contemporary sociological categories. The former approach demands detailed knowledge of antiquity and is often insightful and helpful; the latter is more prone to unbearable anachronism and should be deployed with the greatest reserve. To become familiar with the relevant marriage customs shedding light on John 2:1–11 is surely an interpretive gain; to speak incessantly of the sectarian nature of the Johannine community is, to say the least, problematic.

While treating the latter subject adequately would demand another paper, a few things may be said. Part of the judgment that John’s community is sectarian springs from overconfidence in our ability to uncover the detailed profile of this community, but part also springs from the fact that we not only have the Gospel, but the Johannine Epistles—and the majority reading of these Epistles considers them decidedly sectarian. It has often been pointed out that the Jesus of Matthew’s Gospel commands his followers to love their enemies (Matt 5:43–47), while the Jesus of John and the author of the Johannine Epistles command them

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45. Suspecting that the picture of modernism set forth by most postmoderns is in some measure a straw man, I have been collecting some instances where moderns show an acute awareness of their own culture-laden status, and thus of the conditional nature of all human knowledge. I am indebted to Robert Kysar’s paper above for a fresh entry from Brooke Foss Westcott (1908, cxii), cast, inevitably, in slightly different categories: “There is undoubtedly at present a strong feeling in favour of realistic, external history; but it may reasonably be questioned whether this fashion of opinion will be permanent, and it is obviously beset by many perils. Realistic history often treats only of the dress and not of the living frame, and it can never go beyond the outward circumstances of an organisation which is inspired by one vital power.”

to “love one another” (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 3:11, 14, 16, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5). Is this not an inferior sort of love? Moreover, the secessionists are dismissed as antichrists, and their departure proves they never *really* belonged (1 John 2:18–19). Are not these and similar themes strong indications of sectarianism? We then import the full phalanx of contemporary literature on the social contours of sectarianism and, not surprisingly, soon find a range of supporting evidence for these contours in our texts.

But some contravening facts should give us pause. The Sermon on the Mount, where “love your enemies” is embedded (Matt 5:44), also tells Jesus’ followers not to cast their pearls before swine—which means somebody has to figure out who the pigs are (7:6). The same chapter warns what Jesus will do to those who do not obey him (7:21–23). Matthew 23 describes Jesus using blistering language in reference to those who oppose him: whether one is numbered among the “antichrists” or among the “brood of vipers” is probably no sure index of increased or decreased sectarianism. Matthew 10 expects persecution; Matt 24 adds deception, danger, false prophets, and only the elect being saved. Is Matthew, then, as sectarian as John? On the other hand, in John’s Gospel the disciples of Jesus join the Paraclete in bearing witness to the lost world (John 15:26–16:11)—an act that is of the same species of loving enemies as God’s redemptive love for the world (3:16). Moreover, in John 17 the love the disciples are to have for one another is finally patterned after the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father—and which of us thinks that such love is of an inferior quality? When one further reflects that the “love your enemies” command is in the context of personal retaliation, and the context of the surrounding antitheses brings up other moral issues that John never directly addresses (e.g., marriage and divorce, adultery), one begins to suspect that the absence of the “love your enemies” command from John’s Gospel and Epistles has nothing to do with a generally degenerating notion of love but simply belongs to the fairly substantial number of themes that the Synoptics touch and John ignores. Taken as a whole, it is difficult to see why John should be thought of as more sectarian than Matthew. The kind of narrow-focus exegesis that compares everything the two books say about love, while holding everything else at bay, and inferring a shift to a more sectarian mentality, does not stand up very well to broader considerations.

Moreover, even the earliest books of the New Testament do not escape an “insiders/outside” mentality (see, e.g., Gal 1:8–9). There is unavoidable irony, too, in a faith like Ba’hai: its universalism must find itself rejecting the stance of those who think their respective religions rightly distinguish between who is “in” and who is “out.” One is reminded that in the name of tolerance it is very common on many campuses to shout down and exclude those who embrace some sort of particularistic view. I am not attempting to make any moral judgments on these phenomena; I am merely saying that *no* group succeeds in *not* excluding *some* people *in some sense*. Assuming we would not want to infer that the “sectarian” label is usefully applied to every group, precisely what is the evidence that John’s



community is more deserving of the label than any other? Surely we would need a lot more information than we actually have to be reasonably certain that John's community is fairly labeled "sectarian" in any sense recognized by contemporary sociology. Add at least some attentiveness to Bauckham's thesis about the intended readership of the Gospels, and the "John is sectarian" thesis begins to look tattered.

In short, close attention to texts may welcome the contribution of social history; on the long haul, it will become suspicious of the imposition of contemporary sociological categories, not because such categories may not be intrinsically heuristically useful but because we simply do not know enough of the ancient Christian communities to apply them fairly—especially when we take pains to avoid simplistic trajectories.

(3) As some of the widely disseminated "givens" of twentieth-century Johannine scholarship seem, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to be much less well-grounded than was once thought, this is surely a good time to start pouring over the discussions of earlier generations of Johannine scholars, much of whose work has been overlooked. I suspect that this will prove to be a profitable exercise *only* if the allegiance we lend to contemporary reconstructions is characterized by much more tentativeness than is customary.

(4) We must turn toward a much more respectful and careful listening of the fathers of the first three or four centuries. By this I mean to include not only the vast array of evidence from the second century, collected and evaluated by Charles Hill (2004), to which I have already referred, which demonstrates that John was much better known and much more widely used than most of us have suspected, but also to the more specific evidence regarding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Of course, there are difficult texts to negotiate. The Papias fragments, for instance, raise complex questions. But some of us handle these sources—dismissing the very substantive patristic evidence or choosing the most esoteric and unreliable parts of it—in manners with which competent classicists would never handle their materials. To walk away from this bulk of material and then propose that the Beloved Disciple is a cipher for Lazarus or the Samaritan woman is methodologically bizarre.

In the nature of the case, many interpretations are in some degree (however infinitesimally small) *possible*. But very few are *plausible*, where plausibility is based on the widest spread of evidence and what texts actually say receives more weight than imaginative speculations that reconstruct how they came to say it. What sometimes appears to happen is that we become rigid with respect to our more speculative theories, while becoming infinitely plastic with respect to tangible evidence. If from our diverse perspectives we could reverse these priorities, I suspect we would make at least some headway toward agreement.

(5) My last suggestion is of a pragmatic nature. There is an important place for the kinds of symposia sponsored by SBL, SNTS, Leuven, and so forth. We catch up with what is going on; we learn a little more about what others are think-



ing (although the best of such work appears in print eventually, and in that form we are better able to chew over it), and in any case the networking is great fun. But it is not being cynical to assert that there is very little intellectual *engagement* of the sort that seeks to iron out differences, to correct and be corrected. Indeed, some percentage of the guild would be aghast at the thought: the aim of the exercise is to multiply diversity. Certainly I am not advocating an *imposed* uniformity (as if that were possible anyway), but most of us, either bemused or even slightly aghast at the methodological and conceptual disarray in our field, wonder what would be needed to reduce it a little, even if it cannot be expected to go away.

Toward that end, we may need another sort of meeting—one in which a very small handful of scholars, three or four, all at roughly the same level of training and competence but coming from quite different perspectives, met somewhere out of the public eye, preferably for a week or more, to wrestle over their disagreements on some well-defined problem and to see if some degree of resolution is possible. There are many barriers to that sort of meeting, of course. Where are we going to find the time? And since time is money, who would pay for it? Apart from the logistical challenges, would our egos simply get in the way? Besides, for such meetings to be fruitful and candid, participants would have to attend without any promise of a resulting book or a published “joint conclusion” but with the integrity to admit, individually and after the fact, how such meetings did or did not change their minds—but how many of us would happily adjust our priorities to include meetings of this sort? There are no easy answers to such questions. But is it not pleasant to conjure up the possibility that a well-heeled donor with a vision for the impossible would sponsor such meetings of minds?

In conclusion, the balkanization of Johannine studies brings with it both peril and promise. The peril is a factor of the tendency of scholars to become experts in a discipline, plying their trade on some Johannine theme without focusing first on the Johannine text and moving exegetical needs to seeking the sort of disciplinary advances that deserve to be made. This calls for Johannine scholars to work in interdisciplinary and synthesizing ways, making use of the best findings of the best approaches to John's issues. The promise lies in the fact that because no single approach commands hegemonic control, this creates freedom to learn from the finest studies in the past even if they have undergone an eclipse for a time. This will especially be true of those works that Mark Allan Powell described elsewhere in this collection as not having been overturned but simply gone around. And, I suppose, the place to begin is to take up and read again the classic studies, seeking to reconcile worthy insights from the best of former and recent works alike. That may be a place we can come together.



PART 3:  
DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO THE ISSUES:  
GRINDING NEW LENSES AND GAINING NEW INSIGHTS

As mentioned in the preface and other treatments above, part of the challenge facing a critical investigation of John, Jesus, and history involves the exploration of new ways to address long-standing issues and problems. Just as the “third quest” for the historical Jesus has introduced a host of social-science approaches to Jesus studies, creating new sets of issues to be explored from fresh perspectives, a “new look” at the Fourth Gospel calls for the grinding of new lenses for studying this text, and also its subject. As our reviewers of the literature all attest in their own ways, one of the questions facing Gospel criticism is: What is meant by *history*? Indeed, the objectivistic delimitation of “the historical” to impersonal facts and subjectively uncontaminated data fails to describe “the historical” with its fuller set of qualitative characteristics. Arguably, the only reason “history” is regarded as such is because of its subjective impact—the difference an event or memory makes for subjects: people, individually or collectively. Therefore, a variety of papers were invited to address the range of historicity-related issues in relation to the Fourth Gospel, and the diversity of approaches—and findings—below is highly suggestive.

D. Moody Smith’s paper leads off the discussion by asking whether or not John might indeed be considered a source for Jesus research in the future. In the English-speaking world, Moody Smith stands out as the leading expert on John’s composition and relation to the Synoptics. The 1965 publication of his Yale dissertation, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel*, provides the clearest and most thorough analysis of Bultmann’s diachronic theory of John’s composition, showing not only how Bultmann constructed his source-critical inferences regarding John, but also why. According to Bultmann, the Fourth Evangelist made use of a *sēmeia* source, a revelation-sayings source, and a passion source; his work fell apart for “unmotivated” reasons; and the redactor rearranged the material (wrongly, giving Bultmann permission to reorder the material in ways that obviate the characteristics of the sayings source, especially), while also adding his own disparate material. Smith’s working out of his own theory of the Johannine situation builds squarely on the Martyn-Brown hypothesis (1984), yet he also finds

room for engaging John's theological contributions meaningfully (1995). Smith is no stranger to the historical questions created by the Johannine-Synoptic problem (1993), and upon analyzing the full range of opinions as to John's relation to the Synoptic Gospels Smith (2001) reaffirms his judgment that John's is an independent tradition, neither derivative from Synoptic or other sources. As a leading authority and commentator on John (1999), Smith's judgments are notably measured and reliable. This is why his turning to aspects of John's historicity and his calling for a reconsideration of John's role in Jesus research is worthy of critical notice in itself.

Andrew T. Lincoln brings to this investigation a treatment of the lawsuit motif in Hebrew Scripture applied, then, to a fresh analysis of how the Johannine narrative poses witnesses who testify to Jesus being the Messiah in historical and social perspective (2001). Within this book Lincoln shows how rhetorical analysis can connect both the originaive history of a story with the historical setting of a narrative's delivery. He also works with the tension between eyewitness testimony of the Beloved Disciple in John (2002) and the function of the Johannine narrative as a witness to the reader. Lincoln then unpacks the implications of these fresh readings of John in both modern and postmodern perspectives (2004), and his commentary in Black's series (2005) shows how an informed treatment of John's development history can be highly beneficial for interpretation. His contribution to the present collection draws sharp contrasts between modernistic understandings of historicity and ancient approaches to historiography. By focusing on the testimony of John the Baptist and the wedding miracle of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, Lincoln (2007) gives us a new set of measures by which to apprehend—and discern—the truth claims of the Fourth Gospel's testimony to history.

Picking up where Kysar's analysis above left off, Colleen Conway introduces the reader to what the new historicism might contribute to—or detract from—historical studies of the Gospels, and of John in particular. So what is meant by *history* when it comes to doing Gospel studies? The new historicism approach poses new questions and answers alike. In her own research, Conway has looked at the characterization of male and female characters, applying a fresh literary-critical approach to the Johannine narrative (1999). She has then expanded that work to address Johannine historiography in new historicist perspective (2002a), challenging the works of Martyn, Brown, and others in creating new horizons within which to appreciate the Johannine presentation of the past. Conway's noting gradations of positive and negative presentations of minor characters in John (2002b) deconstructs the notion that minor figures represent inadequate faith to Johannine audiences, pointing instead to ambiguity and the need for more specific analysis. Within the present study, her application of new historicism to John, Jesus, and history shows how the Johannine presentation of Jesus might be seen as an alternative history to the Synoptic rendering. Within that alternative presentation, John's story especially shows the challenging of power,

both religious/Jewish and political/Roman, which has extensive implications for John's audiences both then and now.

The fourth essay in this section presents a summary of one of the most formidable challenges to the Bultmannian theory of John's composition, namely, Gilbert Van Belle's dismantling of views of diachronic composition in the name of a more unified and synchronic history of development. In this important challenge to stylistic bases for inferring a multiplicity of sources underlying John, Van Belle (1994) takes on the most enduring of Bultmann's remaining hypotheses, that of an inferred Mark-like signs source providing the narrative backbone for the Johannine narrative (Fortna 1970; 1988). Van Belle's earlier treatment of the parenthetical statements in John (1985) poses his own approach to a synchronic pattern of Johannine narration, where clarifying asides within the narrative are understood as furthering the work of the Evangelist—plausibly *by* the Evangelist—instead of requiring or even suggesting the inference of another hand. In covering the extensive Johannine secondary literature since Malatesta's 1967 catalogue, Van Belle (1988) shows his impressive familiarity with the multiplicity of approaches to John, and this makes his representation of the Leuven School within Johannine studies an impressive program to consider. In doing so, his and Neirynck's position that the Johannine Gospel depends on the Synoptics argues a historical grounding for John rooted in a reflection upon canonical traditions. Smith, Anderson, and Kysar, among others, will take issue at this point, but the argument as posed by Van Belle is certainly worth considering.

John Painter concludes this section with a thoughtful analysis of the relation between theology and history in the Johannine tradition. With Marianne Meye Thompson and others above, Painter rightly questions the dichotomous juxtaposition of "history" and "theology" as though they were polar opposites, rather than poles between which there will always be a good deal of dialogical tension. From his important treatment of *John, Witness and Theologian* (1975) to his engagements with James Dunn's book on Jesus thirty years later (2005), Painter has been exploring the character and function of memory in the Johannine tradition. In cognitive-critical perspective, the fact that the narrator explicitly declares changes of understanding to have transpired at significant turning points in the story argues hard not just for later traditional developments, but also for earlier traditional precedents. Having established himself as a sympathetic critic of Bultmann's hermeneutical work (1987), while at the same time putting forward his own theories as to the quest narratives in John (1991; 2nd ed. 1993), Painter shows himself to be a careful and reflective Johannine scholar. His present essay complements the works of Thatcher, Lincoln, and others in that he shows how John's being "the spiritual Gospel" and its author's even being called "the theologian" do not in themselves preclude an origin rooted in early traditional memory within an independent Jesus tradition.

In these and other ways, the essays in part 3 grind several sorts of lenses

through which to glimpse and understand more adequately various relations between the Johannine Gospel, aspects of historicity, and the subject of the story: Jesus.

## JOHN: A SOURCE FOR JESUS RESEARCH?

*D. Moody Smith*

From antiquity, John the Evangelist has been known as the theologian. Back then, however, John's being a theologian did not imply that he did not recount history, things that happened. Over the past century we have, of course, learned that all the Evangelists were theologians. Yet at the same time the Synoptic Gospels continued to be regarded as principal sources for Jesus research, while John fell into eclipse. Perhaps not surprisingly, many beginning students, when questioned about the nature of the Gospels, would volunteer that the Synoptics are historical, while John is theological.

### THE ABSENCE OF JOHN IN JESUS RESEARCH

John is now coming back into play in Jesus research, after an absence of a century, and neither its absence nor its return is hard to understand. Ernst Käsemann characterized the Johannine Jesus as "God going about on the earth."<sup>1</sup> How could such a Jesus be historical? The posing of the mutually exclusive alternatives—the Gospel of John or the Synoptics—appears in Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (the German original was titled *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*) but goes back to David Friedrich Strauss, to whom Schweitzer attributes the demonstration of the superiority of the Synoptics, and indeed the ahistorical character of John.<sup>2</sup> Since Schweitzer, critical Jesus research has focused on the Synoptics, not John. One might say this has happened, "von Schweitzer zu Sanders." Put suc-

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1. Ernst Käsemann (1968, 9); the German original reads, "den über die Erde schreitenden Gott," in *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17* (3rd ed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; 1971, 26). Käsemann's footnote at this point refers back to F. C. Baur (1847, 87 and 313), but Baur does not use this exact formulation.

2. Albert Schweitzer (2001, 85–91, 98, 118–120). There were giants in the land in those days (cf. Gen 6:4 KJV). Schweitzer published the first edition of *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* when he was thirty-one. The first volume of Strauss's *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* appeared in 1835, when he was twenty-seven. The second followed a year later.

cinctly, the justification of this concentration on the Synoptics is the judgment that John's portrayal of Jesus as God striding across the earth is not historical.

This is a judgment with which I agree, with a single qualification, namely, that this characterization fits only the high side of Johannine Christology: "My Lord and my God," as Thomas says (20:29). There is also a low side: "The Jews" protest, "Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say 'I have come down from heaven?'" (6:42). This same Jesus also gets tired at midday, sits down by a well in Samaria, and strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan who happens to be a woman (4:1-42), much to the astonishment of his disciples (4:27). God is talking to a woman? Maybe it is God, because the disciples are afraid to ask!

John poses the paradox of what came to be called the doctrine of the incarnation. Here is the point of contention between Käsemann and his teacher Rudolf Bultmann, in which Bultmann has, I think, the better side of the argument. We cannot go there now, except to note one thing: Bultmann recognized in John a kindred theological sophistication that must be taken into account in any assessment of John, Jesus, and history. Yet Bultmann could not conceive of such a sophisticated theologian embracing a crude sacramentalism, a naïve apocalyptic eschatology, and the theologically contradictory notion that salvation is of the Jews (4:22). These and similar ideas reach the text in the ecclesiastical redaction.

To our question, "John a Source for Jesus Research?" Bultmann would have given a negative answer, except that for John the historicity of Jesus, the bare *dass*, was historically true and of fundamental theological importance. Yet in spite of himself, Bultmann saw historical dimensions in John extending back to the time of Jesus. The Evangelist's depiction of John the Baptist sending his disciples to Jesus (1:35-36) implies that Jesus drew disciples from the Baptist. Perhaps the Evangelist himself belonged to such Baptist circles (Bultmann 1971, 108).

#### THE RETURN OF JOHN TO JESUS RESEARCH

Recent Jesus research has turned again to the Gospel of John, but not with a view to affirming that the christological teaching goes back to Jesus directly or that "the Jews" who are Jesus' opponents were his actual contemporaries—much less that Jesus espoused a realized eschatology. Jesus' relation to John the Baptist, which Bultmann noticed, has become an important point in John P. Meier's appropriation of the Gospel of John in the second volume of *A Marginal Jew*. Meier asks whether Jesus was a disciple of John, and in his subsequent discussion, which justifies the presentation of John the Baptist as Jesus' mentor, he turns to the Gospel of John: "Without Chapters 1 and 3 of the Fourth Gospel, I doubt that the idea would have struck anyone that these Q and Markan traditions [just cited, e.g., Mark 2:18; Matt 11:2-19] indicate that Jesus had been a disciple of John" (Meier 1994, 116). Meier observes that in the Markan story line there is a demarcation between the time of the Baptist and that of Jesus, with no time left in between in



which Jesus might have been a member of the Baptist's following. The demarcation is theologically inspired, and this is not the case in John's Gospel. The Baptist (never called that in this Gospel) is dealt with more extensively in John than in the Synoptics, particularly with an eye to making clear his inferior status vis-à-vis Jesus: "He must increase; I must decrease" (3:30). Nevertheless, Jesus of Nazareth makes his debut in the Fourth Gospel not in Galilee, but in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John is baptizing (1:28). There John sees Jesus (1:29) and ultimately sends his disciples to him (1:35–37). Certainly Andrew and Philip, probably also Simon Peter and Nathanael, are to be regarded as former Baptist disciples who go over to Jesus. The call narratives of the Fourth Gospel seem to presume Jesus' presence with, or in the neighborhood of, John the Baptist.

Even more surprising statements implying Jesus' relationship with John appear in John 3:22–4:2. Jesus is now said to baptize (3:22), as did John (3:23). John's disciples acknowledge that Jesus is "baptizing, and all are going to him" (3:27). Then the Pharisees hear that Jesus "was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (4:1). At this point the narrator corrects these statements, saying that not Jesus but his disciples baptized (4:2). But the damage has already been done. Moreover, there is no account in the other Gospels of Jesus' disciples baptizing. Meier, like many commentators, takes 4:2 to be a later editorial addition.

The basic historicity of this scene, in which Jesus and John appear as baptizing rivals, is supported by the criterion of embarrassment. Jesus' baptism by John was likely an embarrassment to many Christians. The Fourth Gospel omits explicit mention of it, while Matthew has John the Baptist offer a solution that relieves the embarrassment (Matt 3:14). Several apocryphal Gospels (the Gospel of the Nazarenes and the Gospel of the Ebionites) reflect the same or similar embarrassment. Is it likely that John would have deliberately created a scene that actually works against his (mildly) anti-Baptist apologetic?

Schweitzer's rejection of John in favor of the Synoptics was grounded in the recognition of the way John's presentation of Jesus is thoroughly permeated with Christian theology, as Jesus presents himself as the Son of God. At the same time, it involves a judgment about the viability of John's narrative, in which John is judged inferior historically to the Synoptics. (For Schweitzer this means inferior to Mark, as supplemented by the judicious use of Matthew.) Schweitzer's unmasking of the liberal Jesus scholarship of the nineteenth century was accompanied by his own effort to do better than his predecessors and rivals in explaining the Synoptic narrative as historical by showing how it both conceals and, with the eschatological key, reveals the purpose and intention of Jesus in his ministry. Thus he offers his theory as an alternative to Wrede's view of Mark (and the other Synoptics following Mark; Wrede 1971). Schweitzer presents his "thoroughgoing eschatology" and Wrede's "thoroughgoing skepticism" as mutually exclusive alternatives. For Wrede, of course, the Markan narrative was not explicable historically because it was based on a theological and literary premise and purpose. In principle it is not superior to John historically, although it may

be narratologically. (These are not Wrede's terms.) Subsequently, Wrede's view has prevailed.

In her recent work *Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews*, Paula Fredriksen, like Meier, makes significant use of the Gospel of John. Basic to her use of John is the simple but telling observation that we are not faced with an option of one (John) versus three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but one (John) versus one (Mark), because the Matthean and Lukan narratives are based on Mark: "The decision gets down to an even split: Mark or John" (Fredriksen 1999, 34).

Moreover, as I have just observed, Mark's narrative, compelling as it may be, is not governed by historical chronological considerations, despite Schweitzer's effort to read it that way by combining Mark 6:7–13 with Matt 10 (esp. 10:23). (Jesus sends out his disciples telling them that before their mission is complete the Son of Man, i.e., the kingdom, will come. It does not happen, and Jesus, rethinking his eschatological program, decides he must go to Jerusalem and personally endure the messianic woes so that God will send his kingdom.) Schweitzer's eschatological interpretation of Jesus lives on in scholars such as Bart Ehrman (1999), Dale Allison (1998), and E. P. Sanders (1985, in modified form), but not his attempt to explain the course of Jesus ministry with reference to it. Fredriksen is no longer in dialogue with Schweitzer, referring to his classic work only at the beginning and the end of her book (1999, 4, 270).

Fredriksen maintains that both the Johannine chronology and the Johannine geography of Jesus' ministry are intrinsically more plausible than the Synoptic versions, according to which Jesus' ministry seems to have lasted less than a year, concluding with a week, and only one week, in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> This passion week ("Holy Week") is Jesus' only visit to Jerusalem in Mark or the Synoptics (except for Luke 2:41–52; the boy Jesus in the temple), although even Mark suggests that Jesus had been there previously. Fredriksen cites the advance preparation for his entry in Mark 11:1–2 and for the last meal in 14:12–14, as well as Jesus' statement at his arrest (14:49) about how long he has taught in the temple (2000b, 238, 244).

Basic to Fredriksen's position is the importance of time and place in the historical development of knowledge about, and opposition to, Jesus. The Gospels, the Synoptics included, assume Caiaphas and Pilate are dealing with someone about whom they have some advance knowledge. Pilate executes Jesus, but does not pursue his disciples, because he knows that Jesus and his movement are not a political threat (Fredriksen 1999, 244, 254). Likely Caiaphas also knew that Jesus was not a dangerous political revolutionary but that his kingdom preaching might well incite many Passover pilgrims to some action that would lead to Roman intervention and to bloodshed. John gets this right when he has Caiaphas

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3. Mark's chronology is vague, but five days, or six, if Good Friday is included, suffice; see Morna D. Hooker 1991, 255–56 notes.

say to his colleagues "that it is beter for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50).

John's portrayal of Jesus' ministry as taking place over a period of as much as three years and including more than one visit to Jerusalem, although not historically motivated, is historically much more plausible than the competing Synoptic account. It allows for development not only in Jesus' ministry but also on the part of his opponents and their knowledge of Jesus, which makes his execution understandable on both sides, that is, the Roman and the high priestly.

Moreover, as Fredriksen points out, most scholars who have undertaken to explain what took place after Jesus' arrest prefer the Johannine account to the Synoptic, particularly the Markan-Matthean (1999, 223–24). According to Mark, there was a full meeting of the Sanhedrin on Passover eve in order to try Jesus. As has often been observed, this in itself would have been irregular or even illegal, along with several steps in the proceedings. As Fredriksen also cleverly points out, such a meeting would have been virtually impossible to organize on this particular occasion. (Matthew follows Mark, although, interestingly enough, Luke deviates in the direction of John's account in not portraying a formal trial.) That such a meeting as Mark depicts actually took place is unlikely. Much more likely is the Johannine account, in which after questioning by Annas, Jesus is taken by way of Caiaphas's house to Pilate for trial. In John's account the Jews (who alternate with the "chief priests") urge Jesus' condemnation, but there is no formal trial before Pilate. (This is the case also in the Synoptics, and both probably reflect what would have been normal practice in such cases.) In Mark, of course, there are witnesses, accusations, and a guilty verdict leading to Jesus' condemnation to death (Mark 14:64). In Fredriksen's assessment, John better accounts for the motivations (11:45–52) and procedures leading to Jesus' execution than do Mark and the other Synoptics.

On the question of the date of Jesus' execution, whether Nisan 14 (John) or Nisan 15 (the Synoptics), John seems to go out of his way to emphasize that Jesus died before Passover eve, not on the first day of the feast (13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 31). Here Fredriksen apparently leaves the matter open (2000b, 235, 241). A number of others, however, have decided for the Johannine dating. Prominent among them is John P. Meier. His definitive treatment of Jesus' passion will appear in his fourth and final volume of *A Marginal Jew*, but in the first volume he sets out a chronology of Jesus' life. In this treatment Meier decides that in the case of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death a stronger case can be made for the Johannine chronology than for the Synoptic (1991, 390–401). In my judgment the lynchpin of his argument is the same as Fredriksen's: it is inconceivable that the events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death should have occurred on the first day of Passover:

Despite Jeremias' deft handling of the material, he cannot really establish the likelihood that, at the time of Jesus, the supreme Jewish authorities in Jerusalem would arrest a person suspected of a capital crime, immediately convene a meet-

ing of the Sanhedrin to hear the case (a case involving the death penalty), hold a formal trial with witnesses, reach a verdict that the criminal deserved to die, and hand over the criminal with a request for execution on the same day—all within the night and early hours of Passover day, the fifteenth of Nisan! Yet this is what the Synoptic passion chronology and presentation of the Jewish ‘process’ basically demand. (Meier 1991, 396)

Meier goes on to observe that the Johannine account is far more plausible historically. Moreover, the Markan account does not demand a Passover setting if two notices are removed, namely, 14:1 and especially 14:12–16, which specifically indicates the Last Supper will be a Passover meal (Meier 1991, 396–97). Even Jeremias, who staunchly defends the position that it was a Passover meal, assigns 14:12–16 to the latest of four stages of the development of the Markan passion narrative. It is also frequently noted that the caution of Mark 14:2 (“Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people”) actually agrees with the Johannine chronology that places the arrest, trial, and execution before the beginning of Passover. Interestingly, long ago Günther Bornkamm (1960, 161–62), who in effect adopted the Johannine chronology, noted that in Paul’s references to the Last Supper there is no indication that he knew it to be a Passover meal. Moreover, when Paul speaks of the Last Supper in connection with Old Testament texts, he does not recall the Passover specifically. Furthermore, Paul’s statement that “Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7) seems on the face of it to support the Johannine chronology.<sup>4</sup> Meier notes that in his commentary Brown supports the Johannine chronology (as he would continue to do in *The Death of the Messiah*, Brown 1994).

Supporters of the Synoptic chronology argue that John produced a chronology that has Jesus die when the Passover lambs are slain (cf. John 1:29 and the scripture quotation in 19:36, which refers to the Passover lamb). Of course, the fact that John (both the Evangelist and the Baptist) describes Jesus as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29; cf. 1:36) and applies paschal biblical texts to him (Exod 12:10, 46; Ps 34:20; Num 9:12) does not prove that John has changed the chronology. It is equally possible that he is assuming such a chronology as factual and interpreting it. Moreover, the acceptance of the Markan chronology poses serious historical problems, as we have seen.

Be that as it may, it is indeed the case that Jesus’ death in the Gospel of John is a vicarious death (John 10), but it is not otherwise presented as analogous with the death of sacrificial animals. Such cultic terminology and conceptuality is more characteristic of Paul, Hebrews, Revelation, and even 1 John (1:7, 9; 2:2). It is sometimes assumed that this is the background of the Fourth Gospel. But is it?

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4. So also Meier 1991, 428–29, n. 108.

Thus far I have discussed several instances in which John differs from the Synoptics but may actually be closer to historical accuracy: Jesus' relationship to the Baptist; the length and venues of Jesus' ministry; the trial(s); and the date of Jesus' crucifixion according to the Jewish calendar. Before moving to other matters, it will be worthwhile to give some further attention to reasons for preferring the Johannine version of the trial scenes.

The difficulties of the Markan scene were already suggested in the quotation from Meier (above). Beyond that, it is a striking fact that the charge of blasphemy, on which Jesus is convicted and condemned to death, is based on his claim to messianic sonship (Mark 14:61–64). Precisely such a claim is the basis for the mortal opposition of “the Jews” to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: “The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God’” (10:33, NRSV), or “because you, being a man, make yourself God” (RSV). Because *ἄνθρωπος* stands in the Greek, the NRSV translation “human being” is preferable, although “only” (NRSV) is supplied in translation. John makes explicit the blasphemy referred to in Mark. Also, already in John 5:18 “the Jews” seek to kill Jesus because in calling God his own Father Jesus is making himself equal to God—a charge that Jesus does little enough to allay (5:19–23).

It is striking, then, that John omits the Markan trial scene, which dramatizes in a climatic way the Jews' accusations about Jesus' blasphemy, which are pervasive in John, although not in Mark. We find in John only the notice that Annas sent Jesus bound to the high priest, Caiaphas (18:24). Did John intend the reader to supply the Markan trial scene? That is putting a very heavy burden on the reader. Does John not know Mark? Alternatively, does John believe the Markan trial scene never occurred in the form Mark presents it? Is John 18:24 a later editorial insertion to allow for the Markan trial scene? In any event, the Johannine presentation, which recounts only a brief hearing before a member of the high-priestly family, after which Jesus is brought before Pilate, is much more likely to represent what would have actually happened, not on Passover eve, but the evening before. The Markan account presents chronological as well as other difficulties that are obviated if we follow John at this point.

Moreover, Luke, having Mark before him, tailors the scene before the Jewish authorities so that it is no longer a nocturnal trial. Witnesses and their accusations are eliminated, as is the explicit charge of blasphemy and the condemnation to death. These are remarkable omissions, since they bring Luke's account of Jesus' appearance before the Jewish authorities into much closer alignment with what stands in John. In each Gospel the arraignment before some representation of Jewish authority is associated with Peter's denial. In Luke, however, it comes in the morning, rather than on the evening of Jesus' arrest. Nevertheless, Luke's departures from Mark and similarities to John are striking. Does Luke at this point know John or some Johannine-like version of a passion narrative (see Mark A. Matson 2001)? Again, we cannot pursue this matter here. Fredriksen

(1999, 221) has observed that many scholars prefer John's account of the Jewish trial or arraignment as closer to the historical reality than the Synoptics, and for good reason.

#### JOHN'S PURPORTEDLY FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

There are a number of other points at which John seems to possess accurate historical information that goes beyond what we find in Mark or the Synoptics. It will probably be worthwhile to name some of them, although we cannot make a case for them here.

John also conveys factual knowledge about Judaism, whether in Jesus' day or his own, and about the land of Israel, specifically about Jerusalem. He knows that Nazareth was a humble village about which no great expectations could be entertained: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46). Jesus himself has just been introduced by Philip to Nathanael as "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (1:45). The arresting party seeks Jesus of Nazareth (18:5; only in John) and Pilate's sign on the cross reads "Jesus of Nazareth..." (19:19; only in John). Jesus' origin in Nazareth, not Bethlehem, is emphasized (cf. 7:42). John mentions other places not found in the Synoptics: Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John baptized (1:28; cf. 10:40); Aenon near Salim, another place where John baptized (3:23); the city of Sychar (4:5-6); a mountain of Samaria, presumably Gerizim (4:20); the city of Ephraim (11:54). That most such places can no longer be located with certainty does not necessarily mean that they did not exist. In Jerusalem, John knows the Sheep Gate Pool (5:2) and the Pool of Siloam (9:7), which can still be identified. He knows that Jesus was crucified near the city (19:20; also Heb 13:12: "outside the city gate"). The traditional site of Golgotha, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, is outside the city wall of Jesus' day. (The other Gospels show no explicit knowledge of this.) John also indicates that he has specific knowledge of the temple. For example, in Jesus' day it had been under (re)construction for forty-six years (2:20). He anticipates the destruction of the temple by the Romans (11:48), which had probably already occurred. There seems to be some knowledge of the layout of the temple, including the treasury (8:20) and Solomon's Porch (10:23). Also, he asserts that Jesus frequently taught there (John 7; 8; 10; 19:20; cf. Mark 14:49).

John tells us that "Rabbi" meant "teacher," as it would have in Jesus' day (1:38). John the Baptist is also called "Rabbi" by his disciples (3:26). He knows that the Pharisees were the leading teachers (3:1, 10) in his own day, if not in Jesus'. John knows Jewish feasts other than Passover (5:1; 7:2; 10:22), and he knows that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for other feasts. He knows exodus traditions (6:31-53). He knows that stone jars were used in rites of purification (2:6). Perhaps most important, John is familiar with the God of Israel, whom no one has seen (1:18), although Jesus, who can be seen, is also called *θεός* (1:18; 20:29). Thus John understands that Jesus and the claims made for him can easily be seen

as a threat to biblical Jewish monotheism (5:18; 10:33). Yet Jesus is called a Jew by the woman of Samaria (4:9), as well as by Pilate (19:19), and Jesus can say that “salvation is of the Jews” (4:22).

We know other interesting items from John. John tells us that Jesus spends time in Galilee, although the Johannine narrative is set largely in Jerusalem. Jesus is in Capernaum, the site of much of his Galilean ministry, although little happens there (cf. 2:12), except his long discourse in the synagogue (6:59). Cana, not mentioned in the Synoptics, seems more significant (2:1, 11; 4:46–54; 21:2). The disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23) is not mentioned in Galilee but may be the other disciple, known to the high priest, who gains access to the high priest’s courtyard for Simon Peter (18:15–16).

Judas is denigrated more in John than in any other Gospel, as indeed he is mentioned more frequently. Jesus accuses him, as one of the twelve, of being a devil (διάβολος, 6:70; cf. 8:44, where Jesus says that the devil is the father of the Jews who have not believed in him), and he is presented as the one who would betray Jesus. Judas’ name is given more fully than elsewhere in 6:71 as “Judas son of Simon Iscariot,” although Iscariot may indicate the place or village of Judas’ origin (e.g., Kerioth-hezron in Josh 15:25). Judas becomes the person who objects when a woman (in John, it is Mary of Bethany) uses expensive ointment to anoint Jesus’ feet (12:5), and he is named as the keeper of the moneybox (12:7). His motivation is his own greed (12:6; cf. Matt 26:14–15; Luke 22:3–6), or so John indicates. But later Judas is called the treasurer (13:29), with no negative insinuation. Although John may put Judas in the treasurer’s role in order to denigrate him further, it seems as likely that the accusation of his thievery is inserted in order to deal with an awkward fact, that he was known to have been the treasurer of the group.

Finally, John narrates a resurrection appearance to a group of disciples, Simon Peter in particular, on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (i.e., Galilee) at the beginning of what may be called the second ending of John (21:1–14). Commentators have noted that precisely such a resurrection appearance to Peter and others is anticipated in Mark (14:28; 16:7) but not narrated (e.g., Bultmann 1971, 705 n. 5). Otherwise, we do not read about the resurrection appearance to Peter, named by Paul as the first (1 Cor 15:5; cf. Luke 24:34). That the Gospel of Peter fragment breaks off just where Peter is declaring that he was about to resume his work as a fisherman (cf. John 21:3) is tantalizing. Apparently this apocryphal Gospel would next report as a first resurrection appearance something like what we now read in John 21:1–14.

#### HISTORICAL TRADITION IN NARRATIVES AND SAYINGS

As Meier once commented (1991, 45; also 3 n. 22), historically viable information in John is much more likely to be found in the narratives than in the discourses. Perhaps it is also worth noting that in his detailed examination of the Johannine



miracle tradition, Meier concludes that most of John's stories have a traditional basis and therefore might also have a historical basis. In fact, the only ones that do not, in Meier's view, are the wine miracle at Cana (2:1–11) and Jesus' coming to the disciples walking on the sea (6:16–21). The latter, of course, has a traditional basis, although Meier does not think John got his version of it from Mark (1994, 908–24); Meier infers that John might well have composed the wine miracle himself (1994, 934–50). In connection with the healing of the man born blind, Meier speaks of "the tendency of the Gospel of John to heighten the miraculous element in miracle stories" (1994, 698). He also concedes that the raising of Lazarus may have grown out of a story about Jesus' healing of a mortally ill Lazarus; he does not think it is derivable from the Lazarus parable in Luke 16:19–31 (1994, 822–31). That Jesus was thought to have raised the dead is reflected in the corresponding Q saying (Luke 7:22//Matt 11:5), which is not derivable from scripture (as some of the healings mentioned are). It may actually have originated with Jesus himself, although again Meier recognizes the possibility that John has heightened the miraculous element (1994, 832–37). Surprisingly, I find no reference in Meier's lengthy discussion of the raising of Lazarus to the similar story in the alleged Secret Mark presented by Morton Smith (1973). If genuine, it would appear to be an earlier stage in the development of this story. Meier thinks that the names of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were originally linked to this traditional story, although, of course, they do not appear in Secret Mark.

As Meier and Brown observe, the Johannine discourses are highly developed theologically. Much of what we find there is distinctly Johannine, both in its extended, sometimes conversational, form and its theological content. In my view, this state of affairs is related to the promise of the Paraclete, whose words will continue and extend the revelation of Jesus. In so doing the content of the presentation of the earthly Jesus' message is deeply affected.

However, a number of Jesus' sayings in John that have Synoptic parallels do not seem to be derived directly from the Synoptics. Sometimes nearly identical sayings appear at the same point in parallel stories, as one would expect. For example, Jesus' prediction, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me" (13:21), is found in almost the same place and form in Matthew (26:21) and Mark (14:18), although Luke (22:21) differs somewhat. Whether one judges these to be derived from, or influenced by, the Synoptics is related to the broader judgment about the relationship of the entire episode to the Synoptics.

On the other hand, in a number of cases such similar Johannine sayings of Jesus are not as closely tied to a narrative and these appear in different contexts in John and the Synoptics. One example is John 4:44, the saying about a prophet having no honor in his own country (cf. Mark 6:4; Matt 13:57; Luke 4:24). In the Synoptics Jesus says this in his own country, even in Nazareth (explicitly so in Luke 4:16–30, who evidently understood Mark to mean Nazareth). In John, Jesus utters it as he heads for Galilee, yet "his own country" is apparently Judea (Jerusalem). The saying also appears in different form in the Gospel of Thomas (31).



The saying about saving one's life or losing it (Mark 8:35 and par.) appears with typically Johannine vocabulary and in a different context in John: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:25). In the Synoptics, this saying follows soon after Peter's confession and immediately after Jesus' first passion prediction. In John it comes at the close of Jesus' public ministry. If we had only the Johannine form, we might never suspect that it was based on a widely attested saying of Jesus found also in Mark and Q (Matt 10:39; Luke 17:33).

Another intriguing saying has to do with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple. I think Sanders (1985, 61–90) has convincingly argued that Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple and expected God to send a new one. In the Synoptics and Acts this prediction is mainly cast in terms of an accusation that Jesus threatened the destruction of the temple (Mark 14:58; 15:29; Acts 6:14; but cf. the vague statement of Jesus in Mark 13:2). In John, in the so-called "temple cleansing" scene (2:13–22), Jesus ominously attributes the destruction of the temple to the Jews as he says: "Destroy [λύσατε, aor. impv.] this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). Then the narrator applies this saying to Jesus' own resurrection: "He was speaking of the temple of his body" (2:22). John has made explicit what is suggested in the Markan (Synoptic) version: "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands" (Mark 14:58). The three days already suggests Jesus' resurrection. John has done several other interesting things with the tradition. In putting this "prediction" on Jesus' lips, he has also placed it in the context of the temple event, which—as is now widely agreed—is, and was historically, really an assault on the temple signifying its end. Moreover, it is addressed to "the Jews," who will later have an important role in condemning Jesus to death. The narrator then makes explicit the interpretation of the temple as Jesus' body. This fits John's Christology, in which Jesus displaces the temple as the place of God's definitive revelation: "The word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (1:14). Unfortunately, the translation "lived among us" (NRSV) loses this apparent allusion to the wilderness tent, or tabernacle, and therefore to the temple ("dwelt," KJV, followed by RSV, is better). John "christologizes" the word of Jesus and fits it into his later perspective on the relationship of "the Jews" to Jesus.

It may be that John knows the Synoptic tradition (or even the Gospels) and adapts the accusation for his purposes. As it stands, he produces not the accusation but a version of Jesus' saying about the destruction of the temple from which the accusation might have arisen. It perplexes his hearers, who understand it in terms of this world (2:22). The narrator then reveals its true, christological, meaning and goes on to suggest that the disciples themselves only understood properly what had been said (and done) after Jesus had been raised from the dead. Not insignificantly, the Evangelist has made this event Jesus' first public act, in which, with his as yet uncomprehending disciples, he encounters "the Jews" (2:18, 20). This pericope, as well as its placement, illustrate John's *modus operandi* very well.

## JOHN AND THE SYNOPTICS AGAIN?

Our focus has been on Jesus research and how the Gospel of John is playing an increasing role. I have also brought together a number of items that might be characterized as possibly factual or historical, including some in which John does not contradict the Synoptics but seems to be presenting additional information. So far, the question of John and the Synoptics as an overall issue has been left on one side. If John is regarded as independent of the Synoptics, the stock of all these items as potentially historical presumably goes up. If John is regarded as dependent on Mark and the other Synoptics, it goes down.

I prefer to speak of John's independence without committing myself to the unprovable hypothesis that John did not know, or even know of, the Synoptic (or other) Gospels. John 20:30 suggests only that John knew of the existence of other Jesus traditions, but John 21:25 implies the existence of other Gospels. So I would agree with Bultmann and Boismard that the published, canonical form of the Gospel reflects some knowledge of the Synoptics (perhaps reflected also in 4:2 and 18:24).<sup>5</sup>

That John knew no Jesus tradition except what he had read in Mark (Matthew or Luke) seems unlikely, since Paul, Hebrews, and James also know some Jesus tradition without knowing the canonical Gospels. Moreover, I find it difficult to understand John's editorial and compositional procedures if one presumes his use of any of the Synoptic Gospels, in contrast to the relative ease with which we can understand Matthew's or Luke's use of Mark.

In any event, John's departures from the Synoptics, if he knew them, imply his reservations about them, whether with respect to their usefulness, appropriateness, or historical accuracy.<sup>6</sup> That John did not find the Synoptics useful or appropriate, whether to combat Judaism or Gnosticism, has not been found difficult to imagine. Modern exegetes have found it more difficult to imagine John correcting the Synoptics historically, perhaps because John elsewhere seems to have given his imagination free reign, whether in constructing Jesus' theological dialogues or "expanding" Jesus' miracles.

I do, however, think it conceivable that John knew or knew about other Gospels, but that because of his unique setting (*vis-à-vis* Judaism as "the other") and theological purpose (in light of that setting), he went his own way. That he knew Jesus tradition apart from the Synoptics, material that stemmed from his own circle or school, would then also be likely. In particular, he knew an alternative passion narrative (alternative to Mark and the Synoptics). Meier has made a strong case that he knew alternative miracle traditions, without committing himself on the matter of a Signs Source or a Signs Gospel. The proposals of Rob-

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5. See M.-E. Boismard and A. Lamouille 1977.

6. This is developed in Windisch 1926.

ert T. Fortna (1988), and later Urban C. von Wahlde (1989), of a Signs Gospel are attractive to those of us who find the position that John used Mark (or the Synoptics) and the assumption that Mark invented the gospel genre *ex nihilo*, so to speak, questionable. Given the historical dimension of Christian claims about Jesus and the narrative spine of (Old Testament) scripture, telling the story of Jesus would have been a natural step.

We are not accustomed to taking Luke's preface literally, but he does in fact say that "many [πολλοί] have attempted to produce in proper order a narrative of the events that have come about among us" (Luke 1:1). If this is not a reference to written Gospels—the term was not used in that sense for at least a century more—then what is it? Mark wrote the most compelling narrative. Who would suggest rearranging Mark's dramatic narrative? I am not equally certain that he wrote the first Gospel, only the first *extant* Gospel.

Whether or not John knew Mark or knew the Markan (Synoptic) "canon," he departed from it and yet still produced a recognizably parallel account. In this respect John stands with the so-called apocryphal Gospels, over against the Markan canon. Was John the first apocryphal Gospel? Yes and no. No, in that John was accepted into the developing Christian canon, although not without opposition. We simply do not know the narrative apocryphal Gospels well enough to say more than that they too did not follow Mark. Dating them will remain problematic, although they are probably later than John. As far as we can tell, they are also inferior to John in theological intensity and literary quality. If John is the first apocryphal Gospel, it is the best. Does that involve a value judgment? Indeed it does!

### CONCLUSIONS

Is John a source for Jesus? Certainly John has come back into the picture as a source for Jesus research, not only in the passion narratives, as Raymond Brown's work showed, but also for the public ministry.

We noted two points at which John's narrative seems to work against his theological interests: his portrayal of the baptizing rivalry between Jesus and John the Baptist; and his omission of a Sanhedrin trial. Two other points are significant, if more ambiguous: his longer chronology of the ministry of Jesus, which he situates so largely in Judea and Jerusalem; and his different chronology or calendar of the passion, in which Jesus dies just before Passover eve. These may serve certain Johannine theological interests. Nevertheless, they are also plausible historically.

We were able to note only in part the host of topographical and other details that John alone presents (e.g., the Pool of Siloam and the pool at the Sheep Gate). It seems more likely that these represent data or traditions John knew rather than an effort to lend more verisimilitude to the narrative, although each instance must be examined individually. In John the devil, or the historical issue, is in the details.

Does John alongside (or rather than) the Synoptics produce a credible picture of the historical figure of Jesus? Yes and no. No, the Jesus who talks Christology is not the Jesus of Nazareth. Despite all the historical difficulties they may present, as well as their narrative and christological bias, the Synoptics nevertheless more faithfully represent the historical figure of Jesus as he was. John's Jesus is first of all the Jesus of the Johannine community, who continues to speak through the medium of the Paraclete (14:26; 16:12). To that community and to countless Christians since he has been very real! Yet precisely the Markan/ Synoptic portrayal of Jesus' ministry, keyed to the repeated *εὐθύς* ("immediately") of his movement and the *δεῖ* ("must") of his purpose, is a theological construct. Schweitzer thought it went back to Jesus himself. Wrede presented reasons for doubting that it did. John's less organized narrative, quite possibly in part the product of a literary process never brought to completion by the original author, may nevertheless better represent the confusion of history. Historical processes tend to be confusing. They become clearer when someone writes about them.

## “WE KNOW THAT HIS TESTIMONY IS TRUE”: JOHANNINE TRUTH CLAIMS AND HISTORICITY

*Andrew T. Lincoln*

Historicity clearly impinges on the truth claims of the Fourth Gospel. If it could be shown that Jesus never existed, or that he probably did not proclaim the inbreaking of God’s rule through his mission, or that he was dragged kicking and screaming to his death, or that his followers’ belief in his resurrection can be decisively falsified, then there would be an important sense in which the Fourth Gospel was not true. Truth might still be found in the Fourth Gospel’s story in terms, say, of its insights into human existence, but its most significant claim—that such truth was embodied in the particular mission of a specific human being, Jesus—would no longer hold. But how much more of a historical foundation does the Fourth Gospel’s narrative need to have, and to be shown to have, if its truth claims are to be accepted?

Some might well respond that the Fourth Gospel contributes its own answer to this question. After all, in John 21:24 the final writer attributes the Gospel to the eyewitness testimony of the Beloved Disciple, who, if not John the son of Zebedee, was an actual disciple of Jesus, and then endorses his testimony as historically accurate. But that frequent response raises its own questions. Does “testimony” refer straightforwardly to eyewitness testimony, and does “true” mean historically true in the sense that the account corresponds to what was actually said and done during the ministry of Jesus?

Clearly an adequate study of this matter would need to take account of a host of related major and contested issues, including the identity of the Fourth Gospel’s author, its relation to its sources and whether those sources included a Signs Source or one or more of the Synoptic Gospels, and the criteria for discovering historical Jesus material in the canonical Gospels. Equally clearly such issues cannot be addressed in this essay. Instead, it will first explore how, so far as can be ascertained, informed ancient readers/hearers would have been likely to understand the claim of 21:24 that the witness of the narrative is true, particularly in relation to the events it describes. It will then also ask what might be the implications for critically aware present-day readers who wish to accept that claim. In

order to avoid the discussion becoming too general and to keep in view some of the kinds of material about which the truth claim is made, two specific episodes will be examined in more detail.

### 1. THE WITNESS OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

The truth claim at the end of the final version of the Fourth Gospel concerns the Beloved Disciple's witness, whose scope, as most hold, is not just the immediately preceding account but the whole narrative. Since I have argued elsewhere (2002) that talk about the Beloved Disciple's testimony (μαρτυρία) here is most plausibly taken as a literary device with a legitimating function, I shall not rehearse that discussion but simply draw attention to its most salient conclusions. I suggested that attempts to explain the role of the Beloved Disciple's witness need to do appropriate justice to two main literary features within the Fourth Gospel. In the Prologue and throughout the rest of the narrative the language of seeing and witnessing functions predominantly as part of an overarching metaphor of God's trial or judgment of the world (see Lincoln 2000). It serves primarily as a functional equivalent of believing and confessing.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective there would be no reason simply to assume that the reference to the Beloved Disciple's testimony in 21:24 is a reference to his literal eyewitnessing, which vouches for the historical accuracy of the preceding account. One would more likely assume that this witness is like that attributed at the beginning of the narrative to John the Baptist, whose evaluative testimony is to the significance of Jesus' identity as the divine light and to his preexistence as the Logos. In an *inclusio* the narrator would now be claiming the Beloved Disciple's witness as the authority for the distinctive confessional perspective on Jesus' identity that has shaped the entire narrative.

At the same time, however, there are also suggestions toward the end of the narrative that, in the case of the Beloved Disciple, literal eyewitnessing is involved. If, as seems most probable, the character who sees and testifies that blood and water came from Jesus' side is to be identified with the Beloved Disciple, then 19:35 provides a prime example. Here and in 20:8, where he sees and believes at the empty tomb, the Beloved Disciple is depicted as an eyewitness of significant events. Such earlier references make it possible for readers to take the final mention of the Beloved Disciple's witness to include not only a confessional perspective but also an eyewitness role, which might extend either from 13:23, where he is explicitly introduced, or, if he were also identified with the unnamed disciple in 1:35–40, for the whole of Jesus' mission. Closer reflection, however, shows that such an interpretation is extremely difficult to maintain. Two considerations in particular tell against it. There is no way in which the narrator

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1. There are, of course, some places (e.g., 6:36; 20:29) in which seeing retains its literal reference.

for some of the episodes (e.g., the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in the absence of the disciples in 4:17–26, the events befalling the blind man in the absence of Jesus in 9:8–34, Jesus' interrogation before the high priest in 18:19–24, or his trial before Pilate in 18:28–19:16) can be thought to be the Beloved Disciple as eyewitness.<sup>2</sup> Frequently, when the Beloved Disciple actually appears in the narrative, his knowledge fails to be a significant element in the action; instead, he enables the narrator's retrospective knowledge to be communicated to the readers from within the story line, giving it the authority of a character who was apparently present at the time (see also Kurz 1989, 103). Any eyewitness element within the testimony attributed to the Beloved Disciple is best seen, therefore, as part of the literary device constituted by the Beloved Disciple's role in the narrative. It helps both to bolster the verisimilitude of the narrative and, incorporated into the overall motif of a cosmic trial, to legitimate the narrator's testimony to the significance of the person of Jesus for human existence in God's world.

Let me immediately make clear what does not follow from the view that the Beloved Disciple and the eyewitnessing aspect of his testimony are literary devices. It need not follow that there was no such person as the Beloved Disciple who was an authority figure for Johannine Christians<sup>3</sup> and might have been at one time a Jerusalem follower of Jesus. The argument is about the role the Beloved Disciple is made to play in the final form of the Gospel and about whether that final form, even allowing for elements of reflection, can be held to represent the historical record of his eyewitnessing.<sup>4</sup> This view also does not, of course, entail that no eyewitness material at all informs the traditions that have been incorporated into the Fourth Gospel. The reference to the witness of the disciples in 15:27 indicates that their having been with Jesus "from the beginning" qualifies them for this task. They are depicted as providing a clear link to the mission of Jesus, much of which they will actually have seen. The content of their testifying, however, is not straightforward reporting of what they saw, but, like the witness of the Spirit who accompanies them (15:26), is to the significance of Jesus' person. My earlier article was completed before I could read Byrskog's monograph (2000) about eyewitness traditions as part of ancient oral history. Byrskog devotes only a few pages to the Fourth Gospel, but his work has been appealed to in support of the historical accuracy of this Gospel.<sup>5</sup> What his study as a whole attempts

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2. Or any other eyewitness; see also, e.g., C. H. Dodd 1953, 449–50; R. Schnackenburg 1968–82, 3:383.

3. The clear implication of the discussion of his death in 21:20–23 is that he was a real figure.

4. Tom Thatcher (2002a) suggests how the Beloved Disciple may have developed from a real figure to the legendary one in the current Fourth Gospel.

5. Cf., e.g., Craig Blomberg 2002, 41, 52, 59, 290; and, most recently and too late for this essay, Richard Bauckham 2006, 358–411, which interacts with my earlier work. The comments

to show is that part of what many ancient historians claimed to do, and of what some actually did, was to include material that was originally oral, based on their own eyewitnessing or reports of others' eyewitnessing. This he calls direct and indirect means of practicing "autopsy."<sup>6</sup> For the most part, Byrskog employs the role of autopsy in oral history to support the claim that particular followers of Jesus during his mission who heard and saw him in action would have been the originating source of many of the traditions that lie behind the Gospels. On this basis he goes on to argue that the process of narrativization with its elements of interpretation for the present need not be considered incompatible with or distortive of the factual reporting of the past. Byrskog is sometimes overoptimistic in his assessment of how far claims to autopsy represented actual practice, but he is clear that such claims became sufficiently widespread that they were found to be necessary as part of the rhetorical arsenal of those who wanted to be able to legitimate the accounts they produced in order to persuade their audiences (2000, 199–223). What appears to be a generic marker of factuality may turn out to function quite differently. In ancient literature, as Alexander (1998, 398) also shows, "the *autopsia*-convention, which is primarily designed to provide reassurance about the factuality of a geographical narrative, can just as easily be subverted to encourage the reader to collude in the creation of fiction." Byrskog's overall investigation, then, actually supports the view that informed readers of the Fourth Gospel would have been familiar with eyewitness elements in a narrative functioning as an apologetic and literary device helping to lend it verisimilitude.

The issue is simply whether this is the case in the Fourth Gospel. Curiously, in his brief treatment of actual references to autopsy in early Christian texts, although Byrskog (2002, 242–44) allows that the reference to eyewitnessing in 2 Pet 1:16 constitutes such a device, in regard to John 19:35 and 21:24 he simply appears to assume that these are claims to autopsy that can be accepted at their face value as involving "the concrete observation of a past event" (2002, 236–38). He does not note the problems with this interpretation, such as have been outlined above, nor interact with alternative views. It is one thing to take seriously Byrskog's more general claim about Gospel traditions and to hold that the Fourth Evangelist will have incorporated traditions, originally in oral form, some of which may already have been employed in the Synoptics before they came to him and some of which were preserved in his own community, and that some of those oral traditions would have gone back to informants who were eyewitnesses of the

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on Byrskog's work therefore need to serve also as part of a response to Bauckham.

6. Byrskog (2002) does not limit his discussion to actual use of the αὐτόπρειν word group, which is of course not found in the Fourth Gospel. Loveday C. A. Alexander 1993, 34–41, 120–23, shows that the particular terminology for eyewitnessing was employed relatively infrequently in ancient historiographical discussions but was widespread in medical literature and particularly in the work of Galen.



incidents related. But it is quite another to assume that, when those traditions were reflected on, embellished, and woven into a distinctive narrative whole with its own theological viewpoint and persuasive purposes and then this final product was attributed to an eyewitness, this claim is to be taken at face value rather than critically evaluated along with the traditions it incorporates.

## 2. TRUTH AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL AS ANCIENT BIOGRAPHY

If, then, the truth of the Fourth Gospel's witness does not in fact entail the sort of historicity guaranteed by an actual eyewitness, one must move to the broader issue of genre and to attempts at historical analysis of the Gospel's material. Although the Fourth Gospel presents its narrative as testimony, which plays a significant role in the cosmic lawsuit evoked by that narrative, testimony is not itself a genre but can take a variety of literary forms. Witnessing is the mode or function of this Gospel's narrative, the illocutionary act it performs, but this discussion will assume, with the prevailing consensus, that its genre is, like that of the other canonical Gospels, a subset of the *bios* or *Life*, the ancient biography.<sup>7</sup> Again, I have discussed this matter more fully elsewhere and so will only sketch some of its implications here (see Lincoln 2000, 370–78, 389–97). A claim to truth is specific to whatever genre is under discussion: there is the truth of a poem, the truth of historiography, the truth of a novel. This, of course, held for ancient readers as much as for modern ones. The genre of *bios* was a flexible one and operated within a continuum that stretched from ancient history writing on the one side to the encomium on the other. Momigliano, in *The Development of Greek Biography*, wrote that "the borderline between fiction and reality was thinner in biography than in ordinary historiography" (1971, 56), a judgment from which it should not be inferred that "ordinary historiography" did have a thick borderline between fiction and reality. The obvious implication is that it would be an error to judge the Fourth Evangelist's version of a biography of Jesus by the canons even of ancient historiography, let alone of modern historical study. Patricia Cox Miller would agree: "In antiquity biography ... had its own unique characteristics and sustained historical veracity was not one of them. To impugn the integrity of a Greco-Roman biography on the basis of factual discrepancy is to misconceive the literary tradition of the genre to which it belongs" (1983, 5).

Plutarch is an example of a biographer who, in his *Lives*, adhered somewhat more closely to the conventions of ancient historiography. Yet a recent study of Plutarch argues that in his biographies, as in ancient history writing, invention or free composition was a central feature. What counted was the plausibility of the portrait, and to achieve this Plutarch was willing "to help the truth along." For Plu-

7. See esp. Richard A. Burridge 1992, esp. 41–42, on the distinction between mode and genre and 220–39 on the Fourth Gospel.

tarch, as a biographer with a historical bent, what we view as fabrications would fall into the category not of true or false but of "true enough." What counted as historical truth was not, then, what could be authenticated by evidence but what was agreed in prevailing convention to be adequately plausible (Pelling 1990).

Whereas lives of politicians and military leaders such as those produced by Plutarch naturally tended to stay closer to history writing, lives of philosophers and religious leaders or holy men were more idealized and often used by adherents of a philosophy or a religious tradition as propaganda against competitors. In such biographies the writers' overall convictions are even more in play in their portraits of their subjects. From early on writers such as Xenophon and Aristoxenus used legendary traditions, invented characteristic traits, and fabricated anecdotes, which they employed in a mix with more authentic material, in producing portraits of philosophers that functioned as claim and counterclaim between rival philosophical schools. Accounts of events and discourses became the vehicle for the biographers' ideals taking graphic form within a historically framed narrative, thereby creating verisimilitude.

The point of these reminders is that to assume that Johannine truth claims refer to historicity in terms of detailed historical accuracy is simply to make a category mistake. This is not what informed ancient readers would have expected of such a biography. It is surprising that Byrskog's work, for all its detailed acquaintance with Greco-Roman literature, does not appear to have appreciated this phenomenon sufficiently. The deficiency is reflected in two ways. First, in singling out those ancient historians who talk of autopsy as part of an attempt to reproduce the past accurately, and who do so to distinguish their own work from a mass of other histories, he fails to note that this means those other histories, more popular ones, have to be seen as equally part of the spectrum of history writing that provides the context for evaluating the Gospels. In principle, one or more of the canonical Gospels could be more like one of the popular types of history that writers such as Thucydides or Strabo criticize than like those that conform rather more closely to present standards of historiography. Second, in concentrating on ancient histories as his backdrop to the Gospels, Byrskog does not do enough justice to the distinctive features of the *bios*. He notes that *bioi* were not under the same constraints as even the range of histories and concedes in passing that the Gospels "have certain generic resemblances with the *bioi*, though the *bioi* ... usually lack any serious sensitivity to the factual pastness of history and testify to the existence of an anecdotal interest in personality."<sup>8</sup> However, he then immediately endorses the view that the Gospels differ from the legendary and fictional tendencies of such writings because of the historical reliability of their presentations. No substantiation is provided for such an assertion other than the claim that,

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8. Byrskog 2000, 44; see also 216 and his discussion of Plutarch as biographer rather than historian.

while the Gospels were "heard/read from the horizon of the ancient *bioi*," they contained "several aspects that link them closely to the historiographical genre" (2000, 44 n. 100, 45). We have already noted that the ancient biography has some overlaps with ancient historiography, just as it does with the encomium, but it simply will not do to use this observation in order to rule out more inventive elements from the Gospels as biographies and to assume the resemblance of all of them to one particular strand of ancient history writing, that which purports to be based on rigorous investigation of the past.<sup>9</sup>

Instead, what we know of ancient biography and its flexible links with ancient historiography should lead us to expect, as ancient readers would also have done, a narrative that contained a substratum of core events from the tradition with substantial correspondence to what happened in the past but that was now shaped by an interpretive superstructure with varying amounts of embellishment, including some legendary or what we would call "fictive" elements. Most ancient hearers/readers would not have been concerned to sift critically this mixture of material but would have been satisfied if the resultant portrait was plausible and in continuity with what they knew from elsewhere. For such readers there would have been no obstacle to the potential truth of the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of the significance of Jesus, because its narrative of his deeds and words would have been received as falling well within the conventions of ancient biography.

It is through such a genre that the Fourth Gospel bears what it claims to be reliable witness to Jesus. The truth to which it bears witness, although obviously related to history, is held to be much more comprehensive than that. In the most general sense, "truth" in the Fourth Gospel stands for the reality of God's revelation in Christ. But the term takes on a distinctive force through its association with the trial or lawsuit motif, in which Jesus as God's uniquely authorized agent acts as both witness and judge. In the Old Testament, truth is frequently paired with righteous judgment or justice (see Isa 42:3; 45:19; 48:1; 59:14; also, e.g., Pss 45:4; 96:13; 119:142, 160). For God to judge justly is for God to determine, declare, and demonstrate the truth. In the context of a trial, truth will stand for the whole process of judging, culminating in the verdict, and its specific content will be dependent on the particular issue at stake. What is the issue in the Fourth Gospel? According to 20:31, at its heart is whether a particular Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Messiah, the Son of God, and therefore one with God, as can be added from the rest of the narrative discourse. The discourse's depiction of the relation between Jesus and God also justifies putting the issue the other way around. As it concerns God, it is whether God is the God who is now known in the crucified Jesus and whether through him God has effected a judgment that means life for the world. Truth is the affirmative judgment on these interrelated issues and

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9. Luke's preface, of course, does contain this sort of claim. On the limited help this claim provides in determining the extent of fact or fiction in his work, see Alexander 1998, 380–99.

can even be said to be embodied in Jesus. The use of the *bios* as the vehicle for witnessing to this conviction means that such truth was not confused with the factual accuracy of each detail of the narrative. In regard to the truth of the narrative in its own terms, the attempt to disentangle precisely how much of the detail is factual and how much is fictive misses the point.

### 3. THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND HISTORICITY: TWO TEST CASES

So far this paper has attempted to underline that the truth of the Fourth Gospel's narrative and its historicity are not the same thing. But present-day readers will not be content simply to shelve the issue of historicity or rest with general depictions of the Fourth Gospel as "history-like," or as poetic, or theologized history, or as combining an interest in preserving the past with a concern for addressing the present, or as having some factual core embellished by fictive elements. Such descriptions may well be appropriate, but they often serve to protect those who employ them from having to specify which particular aspects are likely to be legendary or fictive. The persistent question—How much of the Fourth Gospel is what we would call historical truth?—is valid in its own right. Because there are four canonical Gospels rather than one, because the Fourth Gospel is so different from the Synoptics, and because these narratives contradict each other on various points if read as straightforward history, there is no way that today's readers can escape the responsibility of attempting to sift the narrative material critically in relation to historicity. Conclusions will, of course, nearly always be in terms of greater or lesser probability. It should also be expected that, if ancient readers were both disinclined and frequently unable to disentangle the factual and the legendary, from our distance in time and owing to paucity of evidence and sources, it will be much more difficult to distinguish these elements clearly than is sometimes assumed. Frequently the most that we can conclude is that a particular episode or saying goes back to the earliest layer of tradition and in that form also has some degree of probability for the setting of Jesus' mission, as best we can reconstruct the latter's contours. In the case of the Fourth Gospel it has often been argued, with some justification, that aspects of Jesus' teaching or of particular episodes that can be shown to have an equivalent or likely core in Mark or Q are the most likely candidates for such a judgment and for constituting the historical substratum of the narrative. I shall not pursue that argument here. In my earlier book I suggested that most of the salient features of the Fourth Gospel's imaginative and distinctive lawsuit motif could be traced back to an earlier form in either the Synoptics or Synoptic-like tradition.<sup>10</sup> I shall

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10. See Lincoln 2000, 307–26. A probe of the Fourth Gospel's account of the temple incident in a somewhat similar fashion can be found in Derek Tovey 1997, exploring history in theological display.

also not pursue here discussion of Jesus' discourses within the Fourth Gospel and their distinctive Christology. I assume there would be little dispute that the Johannine Jesus speaks of himself (as also the Johannine John the Baptist speaks about him) in categories that reflect the Fourth Evangelist's estimate of him and that have been developed, at least in part, in the context of the ongoing dispute with the synagogue. Again, sometimes Synoptic or Synoptic-like core traditions that have been transposed into Johannine formulations can be isolated, but creativity and theological embellishment on a large scale are to be seen clearly in such discourse material.

Still, this leaves a significant amount of narrative material that is unique to the Fourth Gospel, including some whole episodes. In choosing test cases in which questions of the historical truth of the Fourth Evangelist's *bios* need to be addressed, I intend to make life more difficult for myself by examining two pericopes that have no Synoptic equivalents. There should be no predisposition, in thrall to some "Synoptic tyranny," to think that such material could not be based on independent traditions that have equal claim to be as historical as some of the Synoptic-like traditions the Fourth Gospel employs.<sup>11</sup> It will be a matter here, as elsewhere, of weighing probabilities, and commitment to the overall truth of the Fourth Gospel's Jesus story on its own terms does not help one to decide the issues in advance. Instead, the available means for discovering what might be said about the historical truth of any particular episode remain the usual historical and literary methods, although always subject to refinement, criticism, and new perspectives.

### 3.1. JESUS THE BAPTIST

The first episode to be examined briefly is John 3:22–30, in particular its two references to Jesus baptizing (3:22, 26; cf. 4:1). This is an interesting case, because, despite the uniqueness to the Fourth Gospel of the record of such a practice on Jesus' part, the dominant view among recent scholars has been that at this point the Fourth Gospel may well preserve an authentic tradition about an early period in which the missions of John the Baptist and Jesus overlapped and Jesus for a while took up John's practice of baptizing. The claims that can be presented in favor of the authenticity of the latter include the following.<sup>12</sup> Just because the Synoptics do not mention Jesus as baptizing does not mean that he did not do so.

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11. Indeed, D. Moody Smith (1993) surveyed most of John's departures from the Synoptics and concluded that, with the exception of the Christology of the speech material, they "deserve serious consideration as quite possibly historically superior to the Synoptics." For the view that the Fourth Gospel's traditions may more accurately reflect the early part of Jesus' mission, see also Francis J. Moloney 2000a.

12. See esp. John P. Meier 1994, 116–30, who mounts one of the strongest arguments for the historicity of Jesus as baptizer.

The notion of Jesus baptizing fits very awkwardly within the Fourth Gospel's own perspective and therefore is unlikely to have been created by the Fourth Evangelist. After all, this story has had John testify that, while John baptizes with water, the coming one will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:31–33). But Jesus' baptizing with the Spirit does not take place until after the ministry and after Jesus' glorification (see 7:39; 19:30; 20:22). A Jesus who baptizes with water and not the Spirit appears out of place. What is more, Jesus' baptizing in this way would be embarrassing, since it suggests that he simply continues the work of John. In the case of Jesus' baptism by John, which had similar embarrassing connotations of John being Jesus' superior, it is almost certain that this could not have been an invention on the part of the Gospel writers. Here too, then, it can be argued that the Fourth Evangelist or his tradition would not have created an incident in which Jesus baptized, especially since whoever wrote 4:2, whether the Evangelist himself or more likely a final redactor, later recognized the embarrassment and attempted to modify the tradition by having *not* Jesus but rather his disciples perform the baptizing. More generally, it is proposed that, if the historical Jesus was baptized by John and held him in high regard, it would make sense that initially he would have spent some time with John and under his influence practiced similar baptismal rites before developing the distinctive emphases of his own mission.

Yet the matter is not nearly as straightforward as the above arguments might appear to suggest. It is one thing to find some overlap between John's mission and that of Jesus historically probable, but another to include baptizing activity on the part of Jesus in such an overlap. It may seem plausible that Jesus temporarily continued John's baptism, but plausibility is not the same as probability. In any case, this scenario of a temporary baptizing ministry involves conjecture. There is no indication in the text that the practice was simply an initial one and that at some later point Jesus and/or his disciples ceased to baptize.<sup>13</sup> If it was a short-lived phenomenon, then presumably Jesus' baptizing, like John's, would have been simply a baptism of repentance, inviting people to save themselves from the judgment shortly to be exercised by the coming one. If so, then despite his baptism and the distinctive experience attributed to him at that point by the Gospel writers, Jesus would certainly not yet have seen himself as the coming one for whom John was preparing the way, nor even as having any role that differentiated him from John. This is by no means implausible. But if the Fourth Evangelist had a tradition that was understood to mean that Jesus simply continued John's baptism and its significance, how probable is it that he would not have seen its negative implications for Jesus' status? Given that he has already gone to such lengths to show John's subordinate role and has entirely suppressed Jesus' baptism by John in the process, it becomes extremely difficult to imagine that he would

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13. Meier 1994, 126–29, makes this point strongly and holds that, if Jesus baptized, it is equally likely that he did so for the whole of his ministry.

now include such a tradition. If it is replied that he was constrained to do so because it was such a strong tradition, then this would apply even more to Jesus' own baptism, as the Synoptic evidence indicates; yet the Fourth Evangelist felt no such constraint in relation to that tradition. Just as seriously, there is no evidence that during his lifetime anyone other than John performed this baptism. He saw himself as the final messenger before the imminent judgment, and his disciples are not said to have baptized. The exercise of the rite is specifically focused on John himself, hence the title of the Baptist, which he has in all our sources except the Fourth Gospel, including Josephus, *A.J.* 18.5.2. Why would Jesus be the only disciple of John carrying out John's baptism?

It is not surprising that other scholars who hold that Jesus baptized find it necessary to posit that the significance of this rite must have had some new dimension. They presume that, for Jesus, baptizing constituted a sign that those baptized had accepted his new message about the kingdom of God, had entered into its reality, and had become his disciples. But then his baptism takes on significance akin to the later Christian rite, so it becomes almost incredible that the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel elsewhere fail even to hint that this was part of people's response to Jesus' message. If the origins of Christian baptism lay in a practice initiated by Jesus himself that had a different meaning from John's baptism, there would have been no reason at all for other early Christians to have suppressed this and every reason for them to have indicated the continuity between the church and its founder.

There is a further problem with the arguments for historicity outlined above. The view that Jesus baptizing with water causes difficulties for the Fourth Evangelist's own overall perspective on Jesus as baptizer with the Spirit and therefore is likely to be traditional is not as strong as might be thought. Despite the schema in which the Spirit is given only after glorification, there are instances in the ministry where Jesus already assumes the Spirit is a present gift. He requires Nicodemus to be born from above, or of the Spirit (3:1–8). He offers the Samaritan woman the gift of living water, which represents the Spirit, and tells her the hour for worship in Spirit and in truth is now here (4:10, 23–24). Are these occasions to be considered historical tradition because they fit awkwardly with the overall schema? Are they not, as in the case of expulsion from the synagogue for belief in Jesus during his ministry (9:22; 12:42), more likely to be primarily retrojections from the post-Easter period?

Advocates of the historicity of the tradition of Jesus' baptizing activity frequently ask what reason the Fourth Evangelist or an earlier tradition would have had for creating this material. But answers are not hard to suggest. Elsewhere the Fourth Evangelist retrojects aspects of later Christian belief and experience back into the life of Jesus. The placing of baptism into Jesus' ministry, in contrast with the Synoptics, has at least two possible settings. Obvious signs of apologetic pervade the presentation of John in this first part of the Gospel. The emphatic transformation of John's role into that of a witness has already betrayed hints



of the later confrontation between Johannine Christians and the Baptist sectarians who continued to champion the cause of their founder rather than to accept Christian claims about Jesus. John has already been made to deny that he is the Christ, Elijah, or the prophet and to utter Christian convictions about Jesus. What is more, his baptism of Jesus has been suppressed and he has been divested of his historical title, "the Baptist," presumably because this would sound like an exclusive claim. Having Jesus and/or his disciples also baptizing continues this latter tendency. Baptizing with water, which had become a major feature of Christian initiation, is not to be seen as the earlier exclusive prerogative of John; Jesus and his early followers had also engaged in this activity. It is not difficult to imagine that, in exchanges with Christians, followers of the Baptist would point out that, in comparison with their own tradition Christian baptism lacked adequate historical credentials. The response by Johannine Christians might well have been to claim that the practice of Christians was not simply a later development but had its antecedent in the mission of their own founder and went back to the same period as John the Baptist's activity. Now the comparative merits of the two baptisms can be treated in the narrative and a clear answer given from the mouth of John himself, about which of the two is to be endorsed.<sup>14</sup> An alternative scenario is to see such debate not as direct confrontation with continuing adherents to the Baptist's cause but as part of the dispute with the synagogue that also shapes the narrative. This would account for the apparently strange role of a Jew in initiating the discussion in 3:25. Other Jews at the time of the Evangelist would have been aware of the existence of those who followed the Baptist and been capable of using this to attempt to discredit Christian claims and practice. The later contradiction of the emphasis on Jesus baptizing made by 4:2 causes difficulty for both sides of the argument about historicity. For those who take Jesus' practice of the rite to be a retrojection, this verse can still be interpreted as the Fourth Evangelist or a later redactor revising the earlier claim once he has seen that it might have the unwanted negative implication that Jesus' activity merely continued John's. Whoever made the revision presumably had no awareness of a tradition of Jesus' baptizing in which it had a clearly different significance from John's, otherwise he would not have needed to insert his gloss. As it stands, the parenthetical comment in 4:2 still maintains the claim that Christian baptism went back to the same time as John's baptism, but, through its distinction between Jesus and his disciples, Jesus himself is guarded from being viewed simply as taking up John's practice.

Where the evidence is so meager, as it is here in the examination of the early part of Jesus' career, it would be presumptuous to come down firmly on one side

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14. For a similar view, see Rudolf Bultmann 1971, 167–68. Somewhat strangely, C. H. Dodd (1963, 279, 285–86) is inclined to hold that Jesus baptizing was part of a historical tradition but also that, for the Fourth Evangelist, this baptizing refers to the Christian sacrament of baptism, which he is comparing with John's baptism.



or the other of the argument about historicity. The discussion may have some value, however, if it has indicated that even in this case, frequently held to be one of the few places where Johannine material has a greater claim to authenticity than the Synoptics, such a claim can involve no more than a possibility. Both sides in the debate inevitably have to resort to historical conjectures, but it may well be that, after a review of the arguments, slightly fewer difficulties will be found with the possibility that the discussion of Jesus baptizing is the result of the creativity of the Fourth Evangelist or his tradition. Whichever way one leans, the reference to Jesus baptizing is one example of the sort of material of uncertain historical value that one might expect a *bios* to contain.

### 3.2. WATER INTO WINE

Whether or not Jesus baptized might appear to be a rather minor issue, so the second test case will examine a more extended account. It would be tempting to take the story of the raising of Lazarus, in which there are questions not only about the account itself but also, of course, about the role it is given as the catalyst for the plot against Jesus. However, even though one would be inclined to join the majority of scholars in finding the latter link historically implausible in contrast to the Synoptics' assignment of this role to the temple incident, the miracle story itself provokes a variety of issues. Many scholars, with varying degrees of confidence, believe that they have been able to isolate a traditional source behind the present Johannine narrative. In my view, nearly all the elements in such a reconstructed source are better accounted for as products of the Fourth Evangelist's creative activity, and any putative source is irrecoverable. But if there were a core event behind the story, it would not really be unique in comparison with the Synoptics, which do know and tell of resurrections from the dead by Jesus. The raising of Jairus's daughter is found in Mark 5:21–43 (cf. Matt 9:18–26; Luke 8:40–56), and Luke 7:11–17 contains an account of the raising of the son of a widow at Nain. In addition, the report of Jesus' ministry to be relayed to the imprisoned John the Baptist, according to Luke 7:22 and Matt 11:5, asserts that "the dead are raised." Evidently, traditions about Jesus' power to raise the dead circulated from an early stage. John's narrative could well be a very extensive literary elaboration on one such tradition, including associating the raising with a family said to be close to Jesus, but the case need not be pursued here, since there has been a recent excellent treatment of the creation of the Lazarus story from a perspective similar to mine (see Wendy E. Sprouston North 2001, esp. 118–61).

Therefore, instead of taking the last sign in Jesus' public mission, I shall take the first (2:1–12), because, although it can be classed among the so-called nature miracles, which are also to be found in the Synoptics, this particular type of nature miracle, the turning of water into wine, is unique to the Fourth Gospel. Whether there was any actual incident in the life of Jesus that gave rise to this story and what it would have involved is extremely hard to know. Some hold that

it is likely that the Fourth Evangelist considered he was retelling a miracle story from his tradition that had a basis in the ministry of Jesus, since for him a "sign" is not merely symbolic but a concrete deed that points to the glory of Jesus and the significance of his mission. But this Evangelist is also capable of creating history-like material in order to highlight the significance of Jesus and his mission. One might point, for example, to the extensive amount of such material in the Lazarus story; or to the conversations of Jesus with Nicodemus, with the Samaritan woman, and with Pilate; or to the incident of the piercing of Jesus' side and the resultant flow of blood and water. Even if the former view were the case, how present-day readers deal with the episode's historicity would be another matter; a negative evaluation need not be thought to be dependent on a worldview that rules out the miraculous altogether. It is not incoherent, for example, to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead but to find a particular account of some other miracle associated with Jesus historically unlikely.

In this case in particular, there are strong reasons other than some bias against the miraculous for finding the story historically problematic.<sup>15</sup> Not only does this sign story, unlike the others, have no parallel in the miracle stories of the Synoptic tradition, but its recounting of the actual miracle is more allusive than any other sign narrative in the Fourth Gospel. There is a further peculiarity about the way it is told. Of all the characters actually participating in the event, only the servants who had drawn off the sample taken to the master of the banquet are said to have known its origin, yet neither they nor Jesus' mother are depicted as then having a response to its miraculous element. Only the disciples, who have not been involved in what happened and whose understanding of it is not explained, are said to have believed in Jesus as a result. Not only is the term used for the master of the banquet, the head servant who was in charge of the arrangements for the festivities, a rare one (*ἀρχιτρικλινος*; 2:8–9; the only other extant use of this Greek word is in Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 7.27.7), but his function also raises historical difficulties. His final comment suggests a familiarity with the bridegroom that seems more appropriate to a friend or fellow guest than to a servant. A master of the banquet would be more at home in the Greco-Roman urban setting of a symposium, where he would usually be chosen from among the guests, than as part of a family occasion in a small Galilean peasant town, even allowing for the hellenization of Galilee. Even more important than this apparent importation into the story is the observation that nearly all its features take their force as part of a sign only because they are elements within specifically Johannine stylistic structures, literary motifs, and theological themes. This applies to the mention of Jesus' address to and relationship with his mother (cf. 19:26, 27); the pattern of request, rebuff, and then response on Jesus' own terms (cf. 4:46–54;

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15. For a useful discussion with extensive bibliography, see Meier 1994, 934–50, who concludes that the account is the creation of the Fourth Evangelist.

7:1–10; 11:1–11); the motifs of the hour (cf., e.g., 7:30; 8:20; 12:27, 28; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1) and of the ignorance of the origin of Jesus' gift (cf. 3:8; 4:11; 7:27, 28; 8:14; 9:29, 30; 19:9 for ignorance of various aspects of the new order, including Jesus himself, its inaugurator); and the theme of the fulfillment/replacement of the significance of Jewish religious observances (cf. 2:19–21 and the various references to Jesus in relation to the feasts of Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication). Also Johannine are the spectacular nature of the miracle (all the other signs have features showing Jesus as surpassing the parallel miraculous activities depicted in the Synoptics) and the symbolism of the wine as the abundance Jesus provides for living (cf., e.g., 10:10) and of the wedding at which Jesus is the true bridegroom (cf. 3:29 and the betrothal type scene that follows in 4:1–42). All these key ingredients of the meaning of the account derive from the Fourth Evangelist's distinct perspective, which fashions the Fourth Gospel as a whole. Remove most of them, and one would be left with little of the present account.<sup>16</sup> The essential content of the whole story depends on a view of Jesus that arose only after the resurrection, namely, that he was a divine being.<sup>17</sup>

One might still ask, however, why some very minimal core could not have come from a genuine reminiscence and what would account for the Fourth Evangelist himself or earlier tradents creating such a story. Discussions of the origins of this Cana miracle often point to the parabolic sayings in the Synoptics about the bridegroom and new wine (Mark 2:18–22 and par.). The Lukan version of this cluster is particularly interesting. In response to the criticism that his disciples eat and drink, Jesus says, "Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (Luke 5:34). The sayings about new wine requiring fresh wineskins then include the critical observation that those who drink old wines are not able to appreciate the new: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says 'The old is good'" (5:39). The account of the miracle may broadly reflect these themes, with disciples and wedding guests drinking freely in the presence of the true bridegroom who abundantly supplies the new wine that is here most definitely the good wine. But whether the Lukan sayings in themselves would provide a sufficient basis for the construction of the miracle story is another matter.<sup>18</sup>

The more likely direct influences on the basic story come from two other sources. In addition to being the source of some of the story's main symbols, the Old Testament may have influenced its shaping through the Elijah stories in 1 Kgs

16. Meier (1994, 949) holds that "the entire pericope vanishes," while Robert T. Fortna (1989, 49–58) is optimistic about recovering a substantial tradition, which he nevertheless considers to be a legendary account.

17. See also Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz 1998, 291–97.

18. Dodd (1963, 227) is not so cautious. He finds no *historical* tradition here but is prepared to conjecture that behind the story lay an otherwise unknown parable about a wedding feast and wine.

17, since there are conceptual and linguistic parallels between them and the first two signs in John. The phrase "What concern is that to me and to you...?" (2:4) is found in precisely the same words in the Septuagint (1 Kgs 17:8–24) when the widow of Zarephath addresses Elijah. Their dialogue is surrounded by two miracles. In the first Elijah replenishes the meal and oil that have run out, and in the second he restores the widow's son to life. Again, Elijah's words, "Your son lives," are the same as Jesus uses to the official (4:50). It could well be that the formulation of the first two Johannine signs draws on the Elijah traditions and is designed to show Jesus as a greater prophet than Elijah in his miraculous powers. Elijah provided a continuous supply of oil in a small jar during a drought, while Jesus supplies well over six hundred liters of the best quality wine in six huge stone jars.

The closest parallels to the actual miracle and its significance, however, are in fact found in the Dionysus legends (to the discomfort of some commentators who dismiss any parallels far too easily).<sup>19</sup> Among the titles attributed to Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility and new life, known as Bacchus in the Roman world, were Savior, Fruit-Bringer, and Abundance of Life. In the myths of his origins he is depicted as the divine son of Zeus and of a mortal mother, Semele. He was particularly famed as the god of wine who had given this gift to mortals. During the spring festival, the drinking of wine was the most prominent feature of his cult and represented the fullness of life and the presence of the god. In the second century B.C.E. Pausanias reports a miracle involving wine occurring among Dionysius's adherents:

three pots are brought into the building by the priests and set down empty in the presence of the citizens and of any strangers who may chance to be in the country. The doors of the building are sealed by the priests themselves and by any others who may be so inclined. On the morrow they are allowed to examine the seals, and on going into the building they find the pots filled with wine. (*Description of Greece* 2.26)

The basic points of contact with the Fourth Gospel's story are obvious, although in Pausanias's account there is no water in the pots that is transformed into the wine. Elsewhere, however, there are stories about Dionysus in which such a transformation does occur. Rivers taste of wine (Lucian, *True Stories* 1.7), and fountains and springs produce wine on the days that celebrate the appearance of the god (Pliny, *Natural History* 2.231; 31.13; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 3.66.2). Particularly striking is the story in Achilleus Tatius (*Leucippe and Clitophon* 2.2.1–6) of how wine came to the people of Tyre. Dionysus visits a hospitable herdsman who

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19. Even Meier (1994, 1021–22 n.255) does not take them seriously enough, possibly, because he has already come to the conclusion on internal grounds that the miracle story is purely the result of the Fourth Evangelist's creativity. On the other hand, Dodd (1963, 224–25) considers Christian adaptation of Dionysiac legends a possibility that should not be excluded.

can only offer him the same drink "as that of the oxen, since vines did not yet exist." They drink a toast, and the drink becomes wine. "The herdsman, drinking of it, danced for joy, and said to the god: 'Where did you get this purple water, my friend?'" Dionysus then takes him to a vine and says, "Here is your water.... this is its source." Since worship of Dionysus was widespread in the Greco-Roman world and stories about him well known, particularly in Asia Minor and Ephesus, at the very least the Fourth Gospel's readers would have picked up on the implied comparison and contrast. But if that were the case, then it is equally likely that the account was composed with these parallels in view. The Dionysian stories were also known in Palestine and may have already penetrated the retelling of Israel's history. Haggadic legends include miraculous supplies of wine in the stories of the patriarchs and depict the water that comes from the rock struck by Moses as tasting of new wine (cf. *Mekilta Exodus* 18.9).<sup>20</sup> Philo already depicts both Melchizedek (cf. *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.82) and the Logos (cf. *On Dreams* 2.249) in Dionysiac terms. There is a further dimension to the parallels. Rulers were depicted as emulating Dionysus, and his role as the provider of life was attributed to them, including Alexander the Great and Roman emperors such as Trajan, Hadrian, and Commodus, with an inscription about the last proclaiming him as the "new Dionysus." Martial (*Epigrams* 8.26) even describes Domitian as surpassing Bacchus. In this light, the Evangelist begins his account of Jesus' deeds with a story of a prodigious supply of wine that sets this Jewish Messiah, who is believed to be one with God, over against any other gods and rulers who are held to be the givers of life in abundance. When the influences from the Elijah and Dionysus traditions are added to the peculiarities of the account and its pervasive Johannine features, then it becomes almost impossible to isolate within or behind the present account any core historical event for this story set in Cana.

#### 4. HISTORICITY AND TRUTH IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

This essay has suggested that the Fourth Gospel, as part of its own often extensively embellished interpretation of key core events that are likely to have occurred in the life of Jesus, also incorporates material that is of dubious historical quality, such as Jesus baptizing, or that is substantially legendary, such as the turning of water into wine. These suggestions may be nothing more than contested judgments of probabilities and in one sense constitute nothing new. They reflect what might be called a moderately critical stance. Nevertheless, as might be expected from someone choosing to occupy the middle of the road, the essay may serve to offer cautions to fellow-travelers on either side. On the one hand, for those who, in principle rightly, insist on a reexamination of the Fourth Gospel's

20. For this discussion, see Martin Hengel 1987, 110–12, who concludes that any Dionysiac influence need not therefore be considered pagan.

historicity rather than its being dismissed *a priori*, it offers a caution that, on the evidence and methods available to us, in practice some of the data for reexamination remain resistant to more positive assessment. The case is that this is also what one would expect if the Fourth Gospel is a subset of the genre of ancient biography. On the other hand, this key observation also functions as a caution for those who have concluded that there is a substantial amount of historical inaccuracy in the Fourth Gospel and that therefore they must pronounce the Gospel as a whole untrue (e.g., Casey 1996). On the contrary, one may accept as true the message of this ancient biography about the ultimate identity and significance of Jesus, while holding that its narrative employs the figure of the Beloved Disciple as a literary device and includes material of differing historical quality.

If one were to accept the suggestions about the two cases examined briefly here, what is the overall truth about the subject of this ancient biography to which nevertheless they still point? In the first case, the material about Jesus as baptizer turns out to be primarily of interest for the Fourth Evangelist not in its own right but as it serves as a platform on which John can provide his final testimony. In the context of a comparison between John and Jesus, the latter's baptizing activity is used to indicate that popular attention is shifting from John to Jesus, in order that John can then endorse this change of focus, including the move to Christian baptism. In being made to state that his own task and joy are complete now that Jesus has appeared on the scene and that the bridegroom and not the bridegroom's friend is the significant figure, John has an unmistakable message for any of his later followers who are continuing to promote his superiority to the one he baptized or the better credentials of John's baptism in relation to Christian baptism. Openness to the voice of the bridegroom himself is what now counts (see 3:27–30).

In the second test case, preoccupation with matters of facticity, however understandable, may again well lead present-day readers to miss the point of the story of the changing of water into wine. Ancient readers of the Gospel, with knowledge of accounts of God's activities in the history of Israel and of the reports about the deeds of other gods, are not likely to have found it offensive or incredible but to have seen it as part of the overall claim being made in the narrative about Jesus' divine power. After all, this Gospel does attempt to persuade its readers that Jesus is the sort of Messiah who is himself divine. The Evangelist, then, chooses to tell the story of an inaugural deed that will provide the paradigm for the other signs. The depiction of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding feast, thereby ensuring that the wine does not run out and, what is more, that the best is saved to last, makes clear that through his mission Jesus is offering the gift of the life of the new age. Wine, grain, and oil were the three staples of human existence, and an appropriate quantity of wine enabled life to be celebrated with joy. Jesus' bestowal of the conditions for human flourishing surpasses, explicitly, the provision of the law and, implicitly, the claims of rival gods, especially Dionysus, and imperial rulers. Its significance will be spelled out later in the mission statement, "I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance" (10:10). In com-

posing this first sign, the Fourth Evangelist stakes out the bold claim the overall narrative makes about Jesus. The other signs, which have Synoptic equivalents, will provide corroborating evidence of his life-giving powers. There is a further dimension to its paradigmatic function. It hints already that the nature of Jesus' power and of his bestowal of life will also be very different from what would traditionally have been expected of a messianic figure or of other gods and rulers. Jesus' statement that his hour has not yet come and the narrator's comment that this sign revealed Jesus' glory anticipate the fuller development of the notion that the supreme hour of Jesus' glory will paradoxically entail his crucifixion, which is his mother's only other appearance in the narrative. From the Fourth Evangelist's perspective, Jesus' divine power and glory displayed in this sign are most truly seen in the apparent powerlessness and shame of the cross, and the supply of abundant life, indicated by the extravagant quantity of wine, has been made available for humans only by the incarnate Logos's absorption of death.

This brings the essay back full circle to the witness of the Beloved Disciple that is endorsed as true at the end of the Fourth Gospel. This is the figure about whom the narrator, after recounting that one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear and at once blood and water came out, asserts, "And the one who saw has testified, and his testimony is true, and that one knows that he tells the truth, so that you also may believe" (19:35). This substantial elaboration on Mark 15:44 is completely unknown to any other tradition about Jesus' death, yet it is here that for the only time in his whole telling of the story the narrator, through the persona of this ideal witness, stops and explicitly addresses the readers. The truth claim he makes must be related first of all to what is implied by the statements of 19:35 within its narrative's universe of discourse. In this light the claim is that the condemnation of death that Jesus experienced results in the positive verdict of life, expressed symbolically through the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side (see 6:53–56; 7:38, 39). The primary function of the Beloved Disciple's witness here is to point to what the Fourth Evangelist holds is really going on in the core event of Jesus' death and to stress the necessity of belief in the significance of what has happened to Jesus. The truth of that witness does not refer to its circumstantial accuracy but to the explanation of God's purposes implied by its narrative. The witness of the Fourth Gospel, then, is to the truth about God displayed in the messianic victim of this world's violence who offers the gift of life. For readers who respond to this truth claim with a faith seeking critical understanding, questions of historicity will continue to require serious negotiation but will not provide the determinative criteria of truth by which they judge this Gospel.<sup>21</sup>

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21. See also Stephen Barton 1993, 292: "It is a mistake ... to make historical reliability the touchstone for the truth about Jesus according to John." On the more general point, see esp. Bruce D. Marshall 2000, 108–40, who argues for the epistemic primacy of the Gospels' narrative identification of Jesus.





## NEW HISTORICISM AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN JOHN: FRIENDS OR FOES?

*Colleen M. Conway*

The challenge of theory is the challenge to invent conversations between texts and theories, between one text and other texts, between texts and the histories and discourses of which they are part. If this sounds like the creation of imaginary friends, it is because there is something of childish play in reading, something of the childish fascination with invention and gaming in the act of conversing with texts. (John Brannigan 1998, 219)

At first glance, and perhaps at second and third glances, new historicism and interest in the historical Jesus in John would seem to have very little to do with each other. If in the Father's house there are many rooms, as the Johannine Jesus tells us (John 14:2), I imagine that new historicists would be in the kitchen glancing over shopping lists and telephone bills, while historical (Johannine) Jesus scholars would be in the study earnestly searching the Fourth Gospel for words in red. These two, after all, were born in very different places. The historical Jesus originated in Germany, born of historically minded parents who were weary of doctrinal readings of the Gospels. New historicism, on the other hand, is the Californian child of literary types. These were parents tired of regarding literature apart from culture but equally leery of an older form of historicism that readily mapped literature according to some grand narrative of history.

Yet despite these differences, and there will be more to come, one can perceive some common ground. Both new historicists and those searching for a historical Jesus in John are interested in escaping the confines of certain master narratives in order to focus on the particularities of history. For the new historicist, these master narratives are represented in period-defining phrases such as "the Elizabethan worldview." Those interested in the historical Jesus in John want to break free of the meta-narratives represented in phrases such as "the spiritual Gospel" or "the two-level reading."

Nevertheless, new historicists conceive of their objects of study—text and context, or literature and history—in ways that likely run counter to the goals of this project. Thus, my initial discussion of new historicism will raise questions

as to how this perspective could ever be a friend to the notion of discovering a historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. This may not be because the opposite is true, namely, that these two enterprises have competing interests that put them in enemy camps. It may be more the case that bringing together new historicism and the historical Jesus creates that awkward silence between the newly introduced, who have very little in common. Still, because I am interested in answering “the challenge of theory” and inventing the sort of conversations between texts, histories, and discourses that John Brannigan imagines in the epigram to this essay, I will do my best to generate more than small talk between new historicism and “Jesus, John, and History.” The way to start such a conversation is by introducing the concerns and practices of new historicism.

#### WHAT IS THE NEW HISTORICISM?

Several years ago, in introducing a volume of *Biblical Interpretation* devoted to new historicism, Stephen Moore wrote that the fundamental challenge that this new perspective put to biblical scholars was a hermeneutical one (1997, 299). By this Moore meant the challenge of simply understanding new historicism. His statement suggests that the task is not easy—an impression that is confirmed as soon as one delves into various “introductions” to new historicism. There one will find a wide array of opinions regarding what its practitioners are doing, not to mention who should be numbered among them. Although I should begin with all due qualifications regarding the eclectic nature of new historicist practices, how it is a perspective more than a method, and so on, I am more interested in highlighting some basic questions that new historicism puts to our discipline.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, my discussion necessarily will be reductive, but ideally will bring us closer to understanding new historicism, especially with respect to the issues it raises for study of the Fourth Gospel.

To that end, in what follows I concentrate on three elements of new historicism: the relationship between literature and history; the importance of the anecdote; and the place of power and politics in new historicist analyses. These three elements correspond to John Brannigan’s basic explanation of new historicism as “the project of reading literature in relation to history, society and politics” (1998, 73).

#### LITERATURE IN HISTORY VERSUS LITERATURE AND HISTORY

At the core of new historicism is a reconsideration of the relationship between text and history. As Jean Howard has argued, no serious historical critic can

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1. For an introduction to the eclectic, perspectival nature of new historicism and examples of the use of new historicist concepts in biblical scholarship, see Gina Hens-Piazza 2002.

escape the fact that such work raises the question of the relationship between literature and what may be considered external to literature: "The key question is: what is the nature of that relationship? Does the text absorb history into itself? Does it reflect an external reality? Does it produce the real?" (1986, 25)

What the new historicist urges in response to such questions is a blurring of boundaries between text and history. New historicism as a critical practice strives to remove any clear distinction between these two categories, to give up the idea of historical "background" for a literary text, as well as the notion of literature as a transhistorical bearer of timeless truths. Instead, as Louis Montrose suggested in an early (and oft-quoted) programmatic essay, new historicists have "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (1989, 20). For Montrose, the historicity of texts indicates "the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing," whereas the textuality of history points to the fact that our access to the past is always mediated by textual traces. Moreover, as Montrose explains, the survival of these traces is not merely contingent but result, at least partially, from "subtle social processes of preservation and effacement." Further, the "textuality of history" is meant to remind us that "those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediation when they are constructed as the 'documents' upon which historians ground their own texts, called 'histories'" (1989, 20).

Now at one level this may not sound "new" to a New Testament scholar, nor is it particularly problematic. We are well aware of the preservation of certain early Christian texts and the effacement of others, with some understanding of the social processes behind those developments. Moreover, those interested in historicity in the Fourth Gospel are quite conscious of the ways in which subsequent textual mediators have constructed the Synoptic Gospels as "documents" in which to ground their own histories of Jesus, while discounting any "documentary" aspect of John.

Still, at a deeper level, this conception of a mediated textualized history does create fundamental problems for any investigation of the historical Jesus, in John or elsewhere. Howard articulates the issue clearly when she suggests that the crux of any "new" historical criticism is "the issue of what one conceives history to be: a realm of retrievable fact or a *construct* made up of textualized traces assembled in various configurations by the historian/interpreter" (1986, 23–24, emphasis original). The new historicist assumes the latter.

At one level, the notion of history as construct may remind the Jesus scholar of Albert Schweitzer, leading her to wonder what is so new about this insight. After all, Schweitzer and many after him recognized how various constructions of the historical Jesus inevitably reflected the contemporary needs and values of the interpreter. Recall Schweitzer's claim:

each successive epoch of theology found its own thoughts in Jesus; that was, indeed, the only way in which it could make Him live. But it was not only each

epoch that found its reflection in Jesus; each individual created Him in accordance with his own character. There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus. (1964, 4)

So was Schweitzer a new historicist? No, because Schweitzer did not contest the idea that one *could* discover the Jesus of history. After all, the well-known conclusion at which he arrives is that once one *did* discover the Jesus of history, he would be an unfamiliar character. He would not be a Jesus

to whom the religion of the present can ascribe, according to its *long-cherished custom*, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making. Nor will He be a figure which can be made by a popular historical treatment so sympathetic and universally intelligible to the multitude. The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma. (1964, 398–99, emphasis added)

In some ways, Schweitzer's emphasis on the *foreignness* of the historical Jesus also leans toward new historicist concerns, with its focus on the differences between historical periods. But ultimately Schweitzer is grounded in the understanding that one can arrive at an accurate picture of the historical Jesus—a stranger and an enigma but the true historical Jesus nonetheless. The problem for Schweitzer is not that the past is inaccessible apart from our always historically conditioned constructs; it is only a matter of overcoming the “long-cherished custom” of reading this way. In contrast, note the self-consciousness of Louis Montrose as he reflects on his own critical practice:

As a professional reader of renaissance texts, I have an investment—an over-determined investment, which will always remain at least partially obscure to me—in those versions of “The Renaissance” represented and produced, discovered and invented, in the texts I call mine. By choosing to foreground in my readings of Shakespeare or Spenser such issues as the politics of gender, the contestation of cultural constraints, the social instrumentality of writing and playing, I am not only engaged in our necessary and continuous re-invention of Elizabethan culture but I am also endeavoring to make that engagement participate in the re-formation of our own. (1989, 30)

Far from attempting to give up the “custom” of reading the present into the past, Montrose speaks of such a practice as necessary and continuous and acknowledges his attempt to have his own reinvention of the past assist in the reforming of the present. Thus, one way that an investigation into the historical Jesus in John could hope to be influenced by new historicism, at least as expressed through Montrose, would be to consider how this project—this particular reinvention of the historical Jesus—is intended to contribute to the shaping of our own time. As Brannigan puts it, “historians do not play a passive role of teasing out and revealing the information contained in a document” (1998, 131). Instead, he explains, “history is the social activity of telling a story about our past and

the state of our present society, and ... historical investigations are 'inextricably linked' to a society's means of identifying and imagining itself."

Thus, new historicism urges recognition of the ways that literature and history are intricately bound together in a particular time and place. It also points to how the way we make sense of this relationship may have as much to say about our own context as it does about the past. Ultimately, new historicism suggests that, in the past and present, we should imagine "a complex textualized universe in which literature participates in historical processes and in the political management of reality" (Howard 1986, 25). Moreover, the view of literature *in* history suggests that, again quoting Jean Howard, "Literature is one of many elements participating in a culture's representation of reality to itself, helping to form its discourse on the family, the state, the individual, helping to make the world intelligible, though not necessarily helping to represent it accurately."<sup>2</sup> At this point one can perceive the anthropological influence on new historicism. Indeed, in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, one of the foundational new historicist works, Greenblatt draws heavily on Clifford Geertz in explaining his interpretive process, stating that he is "intent upon understanding literature as part of the system of signs that constitutes a given culture" (Greenblatt 1980, 4).

This brings us to an additional aspect of new historicist analysis that would question the possibility of finding a historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel or elsewhere. The primary objection would not be the inadequacy of our sources, nor would it be a Schweitzerian critique of the role of the interpreter in constructing lives of Jesus. Rather, it would concern the constructed nature of human subjectivity. That is, new historicists would question the very notion of there being a historical "nontextual" Jesus still available to discover in the way biblical scholars typically conceive. From a new historicist perspective, even if a detailed autobiography of Jesus had been preserved undamaged through the centuries, we would be still be left with a textualized Jesus. It would be the Jesus intended for consumption (no pun with reference to John 6 intended), presenting himself in a particular way, at a given time, for a particular purpose. As Brannigan puts it, a new historicist approach assumes that "identities are fictions which are formulated and adapted through narratives and performances, and that they are formulated and adapted in response to and as a way of interacting with the prevailing historical conditions" (1998, 61). This disallows the possibility of discovering some natural, unchanging, or true identity preserved in a textual artifact (cf. Veaser 1989, xi).

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2. Howard 1986, 27. Since I have drawn a good deal on Howard, I should make clear that she does not include herself among the new historicists. Her essay is an attempt to define and account for the popularity of new historicism. Although her overall tone is sympathetic, she critiques the absence of more overt reflections on method and theoretical assumptions in new historicism.

To put it another way, a new historicist's concern with history is not for the purpose of accessing historical facts and figures by means of textual analysis. Instead, it is concerned with representations. Rather than seeking to describe the personality and motivations of a particular king, for instance, a new historicist might examine how a particular text, produced in a certain time and place, represents the power of the monarchy to its audience. It might further examine how this representation relates to other textual representations of power and authority from that period and how together they form a cultural discourse that functions to shape subjects in particular ways. The result of such a study may lead to a reflection (whether or not such reflection is explicit in the actual study) on how such cultural discourses are constructed in our own time. While such questions bring us no closer to the historical Jesus as usually defined, they do have potential for informing a project on John, Jesus, and history, a point to which I will return.

For now, we turn to a second element in new historicism, the use of the anecdote, which figures prominently in complicating the relationship between history and literature and in addressing the analysis of power that is prominent in much of new historicist work.

#### THE USE OF THE ANECDOTE

As is frequently noted, a key characteristic of new historicist work is the juxtaposition of a "historical" anecdote with a "literary" text. I put both terms in quotation marks because this juxtaposition is intended to blur the boundaries between literature and history. Bringing these two genres together is meant to illustrate "that both the literary work and the anthropological (or historical) anecdote are texts, that both are fictions in the sense of things made, that both are shaped by the imagination and by the available resources of narration and description that helped make it possible to conjoin them" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 31). In the anecdote, the "textuality of history" can be perceived in a discrete unit.

Another important aspect of anecdote is explained in the work of Joel Fineman, in which anecdote is defined as "the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real." That is to say, on the one hand, the narrative qualities of an anecdote put it in the realm of the literary. However, there is also "something about the anecdote that exceeds its literary status, and this excess is precisely that which gives the anecdote its pointed, referential access to the real" (Fineman 1989, 56). Thus "the anecdote produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency" (1989, 61). Greenblatt affirms this notion, suggesting that, in his and other new historicist works, the anecdote was meant to bring "the touch of the real" to discussions of literature and to allow the contingent nature of history to become part of the thick description of the literary text (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 20–48).

Additionally, the introduction of such historical contingency was to make possible the "opening of history"; that is, as a *petite histoire* it creates a hole—an

opening in the *grand recit* of history. To this end, the anecdotes that are of most interest to a new historicist reading are the “outlandish and irregular ones” (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 51). New historicists look to archives for descriptive moments that unmask at a micro-level the power forces at play in a particular historical period. They search for anecdotal material that disrupts the historical framework or world-picture generally applied to a certain period. Such historical aberrations are designed to run cross-purposes with the old historicism’s “epochal truths,” pointing instead to the other more or less hidden “truths” of a given society. In this way, such anecdotes serve as “counterhistories” that undermine the master narratives (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000, 51).

Here we should note that the concept of counterhistory is taken from Amos Funkenstein but used by new historicists to somewhat different ends. Funkenstein defines counterhistory as “the systematic exploitation of the adversary’s most trusted sources against their grain” (1992, 69). For Funkenstein, counterhistories are polemical—in their most vicious forms they aim to distort the self-image and identity of the adversary. In contrast, for Gallagher and Greenblatt counterhistories are subversive, but not through distortion as much as through presenting an alternative perspective, a “hidden truth,” as they say. We will return to both views of counterhistory in our discussion of the Fourth Gospel.

A good example of the way anecdotes are put to use in new historicist work can be found in Greenblatt’s essay on Christopher Marlowe. He begins, not with a discussion of Marlowe’s plays, but with a sea merchant’s account of landing in Sierra Leone. We read of the sea merchant’s appreciative description of the new, finely built “town of the Negroes” that the crew discovers. This detailed description is then followed by the casual mention that the ship’s crew burned the town to the ground before they left. The merchant says, “it was burnt (for the most part of it) in a quarter of an hour, the houses being covered with reed and straw” (Greenblatt 1980, 193). The seemingly offhand comment contrasts sharply with the admiration for a “finely and cleanly kept town.” So what does this have to do with Christopher Marlowe? As Greenblatt explains:

If, on returning to England in 1587, the merchant and his associates had gone to see the Lord Admiral’s Men perform a new play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, they would have seen an extraordinary meditation on the roots of their own behavior. For despite all the exoticism in Marlowe—Scythian shepherds, Maltese Jews, German magicians—it is his own countrymen that he broods upon and depicts.... If we want to understand the historical matrix of Marlowe’s achievement, the analogue to Tamburlaine’s restlessness, aesthetic sensitivity, appetite, and violence, we might look not at the playwright’s literary sources ... but at the acquisitive energies of English merchants, entrepreneurs, and adventurers, promoters alike of trading companies and theatrical companies. (1980, 194)

Here we can see the way Greenblatt draws on the anecdotal material from the sea merchant’s log and eschews potential literary sources to identify the “historical

matrix" of Marlowe's work. Indeed, the actions of the sea merchant and his crew are viewed as the analogue to Tamburlaine, the main character of Marlowe's play. Tamburlaine's "restlessness, aesthetic, sensitivity, appetite and violence" are like that of the sea merchant and his crew. The juxtaposition of the merchant's log and Marlowe's play brings a touch of the real to the theatrical production. It also blurs the boundaries between "history" and "literature," showing how each is intricately bound up in the other.

Similarly, Louis Montrose (1983) begins his essay on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with an account of a dream recorded in the diary of one Simon Forman on 23 January 1597. The dream, which involves an erotic encounter with the queen, becomes an entry into exploring, through Shakespeare, the complex sexual politics of a patriarchal culture in which all men were vulnerable to a woman ruler.

In making this type of move, Greenblatt, Montrose, and other new historicists want to show that "literature" is not divorced from the contingent particularities of history but is part of the discursive practice that shapes a particular culture in a given place and time. The examples also illustrate how the historical anecdote is intended to unmask the political forces underlying a literary work. In turn, the literary work is shown to illumine how political ideologies are culturally constructed and maintained. This brings us to the third element of new historicism that demands attention, namely, its political edge.

#### POWER, POLITICS, AND THE NEW HISTORICISM

While new historicists draw on Geertz's notion of "thick description" to articulate the web of relationships between literature and society, it is not merely for the sake of description. A new historicist reading frequently attempts to unmask the power relations at work within a given culture. And to understand the conception of power operative in much of new historicist work, one must turn from Geertz to Foucault. New historicists assume, with Foucault, the omnipresence of power. Power is not to be understood as emanating from a single point, say, the monarchy; rather, to quote Foucault,

[Power is] the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.... Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere.... It is the name one attributes to a complex, strategical situation in a particular society. (1978, 92-93)



Drawing on Foucault's notion of power, one of the hallmarks of new historicism has been its analysis of these force relations at work, as they are manifest in the textual remains of a given period. Indeed, one implication of this view of power is that texts of all sorts can be expected to represent the forms of power circulating in a given society—another motivation for placing nonliterary alongside literary texts.<sup>3</sup>

In particular, new historicists in the early stages were fascinated by subversive movements within a culture and the cultural forces at work to contain that subversion. In part, this element of new historicism was a reaction against literary critics who tended to grant "art" an automatic subversive status in its display of ideological contradictions. In contrast, as Catherine Gallagher suggests, the new historicists were interested in showing how "under certain historical circumstances, the display of ideological contradictions is completely consonant with the maintenance of oppressive social relations" (1989, 44). The result has been that many early new historicist works questioned the antithesis between the ideology of power and the ideology of liberation by looking at how society co-opts and thereby disarms its discontents (Graff 1989, 169).

So, for example, one of Greenblatt's most frequently cited essays is titled "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*." In this study, his juxtaposition of Thomas Harriot's "A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia" (1985) with Shakespeare's plays is intended to illustrate that "production of subversion is the very condition of power," at least during the Elizabethan reign with which Greenblatt is concerned. There is not space here to detail the argument, but the general idea introduced by Greenblatt and repeated in other new historicist essays is that one of the functions of a given culture is to produce moments of subversion as a sort of pressure valve. Subversive moments are given expression in various forms that ultimately become a way to *contain* any sustained attempt to subvert the dominant power relations. In this sense, new historicist analyses often have a rather bleak outlook, questioning the potential for genuine social transformation. Adapting Kafka's sardonic view of hope, Greenblatt concludes his essay with the line, "There is subversion, no end of subversion, only not for us" (1985, 47).<sup>4</sup>

An additional theme under the broad category of power is the economically based idea of circulation, negotiation, and exchange of texts within a given culture. With Greenblatt again leading the way, new historicism has also been

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3. A critique of the new historicists is that they have essentially substituted their own grand narrative of Power for previous master stories. See especially Carolyn Porter 1988. As she puts it, "This new historicism projects a vision of history as an endless skein of cloth smocked in a complex, overall pattern by the needle and thread of Power. You need only pull the thread at one place to find it connected to another" (765)

4. This tendency in new historicism has been one of the major points of critique from scholars who want to maintain a sense of the potential for social transformation.

concerned with the question of how certain collective beliefs and experiences of a culture circulate from one medium to another. How do they enter the aesthetic sphere from other forms of expression and become “art” that is offered for consumption? How do such texts acquire compelling force within a culture? How are they invested with the power to interest, excite, or create anxiety? In short, Greenblatt is interested in the process of aesthetic empowerment, assuming that such power comes through a series of negotiations and cultural exchanges between the artist(s) and other cultural forces.

The idea of a text simply having an inherent timeless essence is not seen as an adequate explanation. Indeed, along with ruling out this possibility, Greenblatt also rejects appeals to genius as the sole origin of the energies of great art. He insists that mimesis is always accompanied and produced by negotiation and exchange that may involve money and other sorts of cultural capital as well. Here I cannot resist inserting my own anecdote.

As I was preparing this essay, I was interrupted by a little window on my computer screen informing me that I had new mail. The new mail turned out to be a posting for the *Review of Biblical Literature*. On the list of newly reviewed books was Craig Blomberg’s *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel*. Glad for the distraction and amused by the coincidence, I clicked on the link that gave me instant access, not to the book review, but instead to a web page projecting an image of the book’s cover and the words, “Buy this book from one of the vendors below—SBL benefits from your purchase!” Such are the practices of negotiation and exchange of which we are all too aware in our own scholarly pursuits.<sup>5</sup>

Greenblatt names the study of these practices a poetics of culture, defining this poetics as “the study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices.” Although the name “cultural poetics” has generally not been taken up in lieu of “the new historicism,” it remains an apt description of the complex of cultural and textual processes with which new historicism is concerned.

To summarize, it is important to stress that, although “new historicism” is the label that became common parlance in the academy, the concerns and interests outlined above emerged in a literary context. Its practitioners are not attempting to establish a new historical methodology. Rather, they are advancing a different way of conceiving of literature, history, and their relationship to culture. As we have seen, this involves leveling the field of literary and nonliterary texts, privileging neither text nor context, but examining both as constructive elements in the discursive practice of a particular historical period. As Brannigan puts it, new historicism is “intent on using literary texts as equal sources with other texts in the attempt to describe and examine the linguistic, cultural, social and political

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5. The marketability of historical Jesus research is one aspect that Clive Marsh addresses in his 1997 essay published in *Biblical Interpretation*.

fabric of the past in greater detail" (1998, 12). It examines the forces of power at play within a particular historical period, how power and authority depend on, indeed are produced by, instances of subversion and its containment, and the conditions in which certain discourses are transferred into the aesthetic realm, where they acquire a certain power of their own.

Of course, this rather neat view of new historicism is also a construct. If one were to read any given new historicist essay, it likely would not conform to the picture outlined above. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of new historicism is its improvisational character, which produces widely varied work based on eclectic interpretive practices. While this has been a regular point of critique from those seeking a clearly articulated new historicist method, it is also the quality of new historicism that has enabled the sort of creative energy that leads to new insights.

So now come the creation of the imaginary friend and the childish play necessary to invent conversations between texts and theories, between text and other texts. As in the case of imaginary friends, what follows may be visible only to a few. What if we were to imagine the author of the Fourth Gospel—let's call him John—engaged in a sort of "new historicist" project of his own? We can imagine that he has access to traditions about Jesus, anecdotes from archives, if you will, and he wants to place those anecdotes alongside the reading of literature, namely, the sacred texts of Judaism. He sees in the anecdotes a counterhistory, both to the history of Israel, but even more boldly to the history of the empire. In what follows, I use the intentionally imaginative idea of *John as a New Historicist* to revisit each of the three elements of new historicism discussed above with respect to the project of investigating historicity and Jesus in John's Gospel.

#### NEW HISTORICISM AND THE QUESTION OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN JOHN

If new historicism helps later readers appreciate the relationship between literature and history, the use of the anecdote, and the place of power and politics within an earlier piece of literature, how might it serve an analysis of how the Johannine narrative told, and tells, its distinctive story of Jesus? More pointedly, might a new historicist approach to John afford fresh insights to interpreters that have been hitherto eclipsed by modernistic approaches to investigations of John, Jesus, and history? Consider now a playful sketching of John as a new historicist and see what emerges.

#### THE TEXTUALIZED JESUS AND HISTORY IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

First, a question: What if the idea of "history" in the Gospel is quite a bit closer to the postmodern conception of history discussed above than to the modernist emphasis on "what really happened"? Perhaps for John "what *really* happened" from his perspective and the perspective of his community is not what a video

camera might have captured of the historical Jesus. Indeed, what *really* happened, from his perspective, can *only* be made apparent through his particular construction of Jesus. Like the new historicist, this author's concern with history is not for the purpose of accessing historical facts and figures—his concern is with representation. Thus, the Jesus that comes striding out of these pages is precisely John's "historical" Jesus, if history is understood as the product of textual traces that have been compiled and mediated by interpreters/historians. If this is the case, there is no other "historical" Jesus than the Jesus construct that comes to us by way of texts such as the Fourth Gospel. For John, and I would argue for us, the Johannine Jesus *is* the (or rather a) "historical" Jesus, albeit only incarnate in a literary form.

So here we have some good news to bring to our concern for John, Jesus, and history. From a new historicist perspective, the Gospel of John and the Jesus it produces are considered every bit as "historical" as, say, the Synoptic Gospels, insofar as this Gospel is one of the textual traces that have survived the social processes of preservation. Part of the impetus for this project comes from the way the "spiritual Gospel" has been marginalized in discussions of Jesus and history. But a new historicist approach would have no reason to leave the Fourth Gospel out of such discussions, simply because of its spiritual or mythological aspects. Moreover, there would be no issue of privileging the Synoptic Gospels (or Thomas) over John as source material, since all texts are cultural representations on equal footing. There is some overlap, then, with the goals of the John, Jesus, and History project and new historicism's desire to bring all sorts of texts into dialogue. One could say that turning to the Gospel of John is a way of focusing on the role of one sort of text in the complex textualized universe that makes up the world of early Christianity or, depending on how broad one's reach is, the late first-century Mediterranean world.

So much for the good news; perhaps the untenable news, at least from many a historian's perspective, is that to focus on the Gospel in this way would not be to access more data for discovering some nontextual historical Jesus. Since new historicism does not understand history to be a science of the retrieval of facts, neither would the Fourth Gospel be viewed as a deposit of retrievable facts. This also would apply, by the way, to the retrieval of facts about the Johannine community. The new historicist would not turn from the inaccessibility of the historical Jesus to find a readily perceived context, or background, for the Gospel. There would be no attempt to situate the Gospel *in* history but rather to explore the reciprocal relationship between text and context.

Here it may be useful to recall the questions that Jean Howard (1986) raises regarding the relationship of text and history. What type of relationship does the Fourth Gospel have in relation to history? Does it absorb history into itself? Does it reflect an external reality? Does it produce the real? These are particularly significant and compelling questions to put to the Fourth Gospel, perhaps to all religious literature, since its tendency is often to absorb history into itself and to

produce the “real” for a given culture. What does the Prologue relate, for example, if not an absorption of history, of the finite, into the infinite? “All things came into being through [the Word], and without [the Word] not one thing came into being. What has come into being in [the Word] was life” (John 1:3–4). From the perspective of this Gospel, there is no history outside of the “Word.”

Yet we would have no access to this Word outside of its articulation in the text. Yes, the Word becomes flesh in Jesus, but it becomes flesh only in the Johannine Jesus—the textualized Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. Thus, from the fourteenth verse of this Gospel, it is clear that the relationship between text and context, between Jesus and history, so to speak, is complex. This textualized Jesus somehow absorbs all of history, and if we are to consider what is “historical” from the perspective of the Fourth Gospel, we must begin with this recognition. We can, of course, dismiss the Prologue as mytho-theological poetry in our search for historicity, but this would be to dismiss the relationship constructed in the Fourth Gospel between Jesus and history.

That is to say, if we are to understand the Fourth Gospel on its own terms—yes, to let John be John—we must consider in a serious way its definition of history, a definition that begins in the Prologue and continues throughout the Gospel.<sup>6</sup> This is a Gospel intent on producing history, on providing a picture of the historical Jesus, who is at the same time outside of history. This is the reality it produces for its audience. We will examine this reality a bit further by considering the use of the anecdote with respect to the Gospel. In this case, we will see how very blurred the boundaries between text and context become. If the Gospel begins by the encompassing of history by a textualized Jesus, it will continue by juxtaposing an anecdotal (“real”) Jesus with the literary texts of ancient Israel.

#### JOHN’S “TOUCH OF THE REAL”

In the introduction to the Gospel of John in the *Oxford Annotated Bible*, Donald Miller assures the reader that, like the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, this author “records real events.” This impression, I would argue is the “touch of the real” provided by the anecdotal material the author uses, namely, the *petite histoires* about Jesus. Indeed, I would like to continue gaming a bit more and imagine that what our new historicist Evangelist does is juxtapose anecdotal material, Jesus traditions, as a counterhistory that will challenge the grand narratives of his time and shape the memory/subjectivity of his readers. For this seems to be the driving force behind much of the Jesus material used by the author. Put differently, this Evangelist’s interest in presenting a “historical Jesus” is not so much an interest in

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6. Arthur J. Dewey argues similarly when he suggests that “history becomes meaningful when the deeds of Jesus (in this case, his death) and scripture come together in remembrance” (2001, 68).

presenting a past history as it is in breaking open a particular reading of an old script(ure). One can see this process at work at multiple levels, and in what follows I offer just a few examples.

Throughout the Gospel the Evangelist continually juxtaposes traditions from the grand narrative of Torah, grounded in Moses, with events from the life of Jesus. The author is writing at a time when Moses has gained extraordinary status in the Jewish tradition, to the extent that Philo can speak of his godlike nature (e.g., *On the Life of Moses* 1.158). Moses, as recipient and giver of Torah (see John 1:17; 7:19), represents the master narrative of God's relationship with the people of Israel. Yet from the Prologue on, the Evangelist places Jesus alongside Moses, opening up the Moses tradition and presenting an alternative history in which Jesus, not Moses, is the central figure.

To be sure, the authority of Moses is recognized but simultaneously also subverted by the authority of Jesus. The complexity of this relationship can be seen from the very first mention of Moses: "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). From here on the Evangelist repeatedly emphasizes that Moses wrote about Jesus, even having Jesus make this claim directly (1:45; 5:46). In so doing, he writes Jesus into the sacred literature of ancient Israel. This is certainly a complex blurring of boundaries in which the Johannine Jesus, becoming "real" in the anecdotal episodes in the Gospel, finds his way into the literature of ancient Israel.

The Evangelist goes on to compare Jesus' saving activity with that of Moses but then castigates the Jews for setting their hope on Moses, who also stands as their accuser (3:14; 5:45). The author narrates Jesus' feeding of the five thousand but sees the anecdote as a means of displacing Moses' manna in the wilderness, which cannot stave off death, in favor of Jesus as the *true* bread that leads to eternal life (6:49–51). Furthermore, the Johannine Jesus, supposedly a Jew himself, both distances himself from the Jewish law (given through Moses) and uses it to his benefit: "In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf" (8:17–18). Finally, in the last mention of Moses in the Gospel, being a disciple of Moses is negatively juxtaposed with being a disciple of Jesus (9:28–29). This scene ends with the birth of a new disciple of Jesus, who confesses belief in Jesus and worships him (9:38).

Of course, the Gospel's supplanting of Moses and of the ancestors is well known to the Johannine scholar. Moreover, the supplanting of Moses by Jesus is not the same as placing a sea merchant's log next to one of Marlowe's plays. Still, what the new historicist lens has to offer is the recognition of this pattern as John's way of writing not just a Christology but also a history. If anything, John's Gospel is a "counterhistory" in the making. Moreover, it is the type of counterhistory of which Funkenstein speaks: a reading against the grain of the adversaries' trusted sources. As Funkenstein puts it, at their worst such counterhistories "deprive the adversary of his positive identity, of his self-image, and substitute for it a pejora-

tive counter image" (1992, 79–80). This is exactly the pattern that one finds in John 8, where the Jews are gradually stripped of their identity both as children of Abraham and children of God and become instead children of the devil (8:39, 42, 44). To be sure, Gallagher and Greenblatt's use of anecdotes to uncover "hidden truths" that disrupt the master narrative may describe quite closely how the Evangelist understood his own counterhistory writing. But his rhetorical strategies suggest that the articulation of counterhistories is, as Funkenstein says, always polemical. By now, whatever "hidden truth" the author was attempting to reveal through his counterhistory has long been tainted by the pejorative counter image his history constructs.

If the author's juxtaposition of Jesus with the sacred literature of Israel blurs the boundaries between history and literature, such boundaries are blurred further still when we observe that the words of the Johannine Jesus are also scripture (literature) in the making. We see the beginning of this process in the so-called "temple cleansing" scene, in which Jesus' dramatic proclamation against a temple practice—"Stop making my Father's house a marketplace"—is followed by the report of the disciples' later memory of a literary text: "Zeal for your house will consume me" (2:16b–17). Here we have anecdotal event juxtaposed with literary text. The narrative resumes with a challenge by the Jews, followed by Jesus' retort: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). The conclusion of the narrative moves once again to the future, as the narrator reports, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:22).

This conjoining of scripture and Jesus' words at such an early stage in the narrative begins to put the two on an equal level. As the Gospel proceeds, we find the familiar pattern in which Jesus' actions are understood as the fulfillment of scripture (see 3:29; 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12). However, only in this Gospel do we also find citation formulas used for the words of Jesus. For example, Jesus' admonition to free his followers is to "fulfill the words that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me'" (18:9). Similarly, during the trial before Pilate, the Jews' refusal to execute judgment on Jesus is understood as a fulfillment "of what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die" (18:32). In effect, this Gospel presents us with "scripturing" of Jesus at a level that moves beyond the Synoptic Gospels. Not only is Jesus spoken about in the law and the prophets, not only do his actions fulfill ancient scripture: *his own words become scripture to be fulfilled*.

Here is perhaps the strongest example of the blurring of boundaries between history and literature. Within the confines of the Gospel text, the author portrays the words of the "real" Jesus (the Jesus of anecdote) with the same authority as the canonical literature of ancient Israel. In effect, any lines between history and literature collapse at this point. If in the beginning of the Gospel the textualized Jesus encompasses all of history, by the end of the Gospel the "historical Jesus" has



become sacred literature. As we have seen, such construction of both literature and history is intricately bound up in systems of power, according to the new historicism. So we move to this final area for discussion.

#### POWER, POLITICS, AND THE JOHANNINE JESUS

Fundamentally, one might read the Fourth Gospel as a discourse on power. Again beginning in the Prologue, with a proleptic view of the benefits that come to Jesus' believers, Jesus is depicted as the dispenser of power. To those "who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (1:12). The rest of the Gospel represents Jesus as one with the power to bestow such a gift. Indeed, the Johannine Jesus claims an astounding range of authority, from that of executing judgment (5:27), to power over his own life and death (10:18), to power over others' lives and deaths (5:21; 6:40; 11:1–44). Indeed, only in this Gospel does Jesus claim the power to raise himself from death.<sup>7</sup> Additional assurance of the totality of Jesus' power comes in the midst of the Farewell Discourse, in which the Johannine Jesus assures his disciples that "the ruler of this world" has no power over him (14:30). In prayer, Jesus claims that the Father has given the Son "power over all flesh" (17:2).

That "all flesh" includes representatives of the Roman Empire is made plain in the trial before Pilate. On the one hand, Pilate forces the Jews to recognize their own limits of power under Rome: "we are not permitted to put anyone to death" (18:31b). In contrast, when Pilate makes claims about his own authority over Jesus, "I have power to release you, and power to crucify you" (19:10), Jesus dismisses him: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (19:11). The point is clear. Even Rome is under the authority of God, who acts in Jesus. This is the reality that John's readers are intended to grasp, in spite of all other appearances to the contrary. At this point, we have the sort of "counterhistory" envisioned by new historicists. Whether successful or not, the history the author is trying to write is one in which imperial power is undercut. The historical Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, as a character with claims to ultimate power and authority, is intended to appeal to a people dominated by foreign power. Therein lies the subversive aspect of this history.

Of course, we already know how this subversive moment will eventually be contained. In spite of the ways the Johannine Jesus undermines Roman authority, such subversion will be more than contained by Constantine. In only a few hundred years, Rome will be able to say, "The Father and I are one" (see 10:30). Even the subversive move to turn Jesus' words into scripture is ultimately contained within a canon where the historical Johannine Jesus is placed after three other

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7. For examples and variations of the standard confession, "God raised him," see Matt 20:19; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 1 Cor 6:14; Rom 4:24–25; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Pet 1:21.



textual Jesuses and shares space with others who also speak scripture, such as Paul, James, Peter, and John the elder.

#### CONCLUSIONS: JOHN, JESUS, AND THE NEW HISTORICISM

More could be said in this conversation between new historicism and the interest in John, Jesus, and history. In the end, it seems that new historicism and quests for the historical Jesus in John need not be enemies. Each, however, may need to adapt to the other if a friendship is to be had. This essay has focused largely on how the idea of the historical Jesus would need to be modified. Others may do the work of suggesting how new historicism may also need adaptation. But, as mentioned earlier, new historicism is by nature improvisational and eclectic and so may well have room to accommodate the distinctive aspects of Gospel studies.

It does appear useful, however, to turn to new historicism for clues as to how to move beyond questing-as-usual for the historical Jesus. One step would be to leave behind, finally, the idea that there is a nontextual Jesus to which we have access if we only dig long enough and peer closely enough at the right texts. But in leaving such a Jesus behind, we may gain a better understanding of how the Johannine Jesus—a historical construct, however textual—was intended to respond to, as well as shape, the religious, social, and political structures of the first-century Mediterranean world. If we work with the ideas that new historicism has to offer, we may gain a better sense of the process by which the historical Johannine Jesus is created and gains authoritative force within a culture. This, in turn, may teach us more about how this historical, textualized Johannine Jesus contributes to the formation of a particular kind of Christian subject, both in the first century and in our contemporary culture.

In other words, to take up the issues of new historicism with respect to John's Gospel is to move toward more than questions of historicity of (purportedly) nontextual subjects. In this essay I have chosen to play with the idea of John as a new historicist in order to explore how the author of the Fourth Gospel works with history, literature, anecdote, and power. Yet, as we have seen, there is potential to take the conversation in multiple directions. For instance, one might consider the Gospel of John as first-century literature (rather than a collection of anecdotes) and juxtapose it with nonliterary texts from the first century. This would be an attempt to understand how this Gospel and its representation of Jesus contribute to the formation of a broader cultural discourse in the early centuries of Christianity. In short, there are many ways of "inventing a conversation" between the Fourth Gospel and new historicism and much to be gained from the childish play necessary for such innovation.



## JOHN'S LITERARY UNITY AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICITY

*Gilbert Van Belle  
with Sydney Palmer*

Professor Tom Thatcher's invitation to consider the problem of the literary unity of the Gospel of John and its consequences for the search for the historical Jesus has allowed me to reflect on the exegetical method that I was taught in Louvain. This essay is only an initial treatment of this reflection, but I confess I still consider the "Louvain method" to provide the most feasible working hypothesis. After a very brief overview of the questions bequeathed to us by nineteenth-century research and the evolution of source theories throughout the earlier part of the twentieth century, I will go into more detail about the issues we presently face and how Louvain's hypothesis best answers these dilemmas.

The problem of historicity in John is closely related, on the one hand, to the problem of John's relation to the Synoptics and, on the other, to the problem of John's literary unity. Since the nineteenth century, the debate on the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel has been closely related to the "Johannine question," which can be distilled essentially into the problem of the Gospel's origin. It is the question about who the author was and whether he was an eyewitness. Moreover, these questions evoke a further one: How can a Gospel that claims to be an eyewitness account differ so much from the Synoptic Gospels? The issue of the Fourth Gospel's historicity is also closely related to the problem of its literary unity. If the Fourth Evangelist is not an eyewitness, is it still possible to separate an original *Grundschrift* from later additions or to separate older traditions or sources from the Evangelist's own redaction? Or is the Gospel of John, to use the famous simile of David F. Strauss, a seamless robe?

At the start of the twentieth century, exegetes generally held that the Gospel of John was dependent on the Synoptic Gospels. John A. T. Robinson gave a concise summary of this position in five points: (1) the Fourth Evangelist is dependent on sources, including (normally) one or more of the Synoptic Gospels; (2) his own background is other than that of the events and teaching he is purporting to record; (3) he is to be regarded as a serious witness not to the Jesus

of history but simply to the Christ of faith; (4) he represents the end term of theological development in first-century Christianity; (5) he is not himself the apostle John nor a direct eyewitness (Robinson 1959, 399 = 1962, 95).

The tide turned in 1938 with the publication of Perceival Gardner-Smith's book in which, after carefully analyzing the similarities and dissimilarities between John and the Synoptics, he argues that an independent, non-Synoptic source lies at the origin of the Gospel of John. John P. Meier gives a pithy summary of the ramifications of Gardner-Smith's work:

Early in this century it was largely taken for granted that John knew and used the Synoptic Gospels. P. Gardner-Smith challenged that view in 1938, claiming that John represented an independent tradition. This position was worked out in detail by C. H. Dodd and was accepted by such major commentators as Raymond Brown, Rudolf Schnackenburg, and Ernst Haenchen. It is probably the majority opinion today, but by no means the unanimous one. For instance, the great Louvain exegete Frans Neirynck holds that John is dependent on Mark, Matthew, and Luke. (Meier 1991, 44)

Meier explicitly rejects Neirynck's point of view and places the Gospel of John among the most important sources in the search for the historical Jesus:

In my opinion, however, scholars like Dodd and Brown have the better part of the argument. The Johannine presentation of Jesus' ministry is just too massively different to be derived from the Synoptics; and even where John does parallel the Synoptics, the strange mixture and erratic pattern of agreements and disagreements are best explained by a stream of tradition similar to, but independent of, the Synoptics. In short, our survey of the Four Gospels gives us three separate major sources to work with: Mark, Q and John. (Meier 1991, 44; see also 174–75)

Several scholars express these dilemmas quite well in their own work. For example E. P. Sanders is far more reserved in his historical assessment. In his chapter on "The Problems of the Primary Sources," he formulates the following point after discussing the question of John and the Synoptics: "we can say neither that John was creative only with the teaching material, nor that he had a good source for his narrative and that he followed it faithfully" (Sanders 1993, 72). But, regarding the trial of Jesus before the Jewish authorities, he emphasizes:

I would like to accept John's account of the Jewish trial because it is so much more believable than the synoptic trial, but it would be arbitrary to choose this part if I cannot show that a good source underlies John 18.12f., 24, and I cannot. Possibly John was just more astute with regard to *realpolitik* than were the other evangelists, and so wrote a story with greater verisimilitude. The Jewish trial in John is like the sort of thing that really happened in Judaea and in other Roman provinces that were governed in the same war. Whether it is an accurate account

of what happened on that particular night in Jerusalem is another question. (Sanders 1993, 72)

Sanders's comment brings to the fore the tension between historical reality and the skill of literary technique in creating a scene that may seem more real than a more historically accurate account. He does not claim that John's account is unhistorical, only that he has no proof other than the Evangelist's excruciatingly accurate vision of human nature in such moments.

Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz discuss the relation between "the Johannine picture of Jesus" and "the historical Jesus" and find that the Johannine image of Jesus is the "most stylized on the basis of theological premises" of any in the four Gospels. They immediately add: "Nevertheless, the Gospel of John, which is independent of the Synoptics, is not worthless. At some usually quite unemphatic places it hands down data which diverge from the Synoptics, and can go back to old traditions" (1998, 36–37). Theissen and Merz hold an intriguing line here because they admit that the highly theological character of the Johannine Jesus need not mean that the Fourth Gospel itself has no historical value. Of course, how one can discern the degree to which such traditions, to which remnants of information may be traced, are "history" is the next difficult question.

Paula Fredriksen makes continuous use of the Gospel of John in her book *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. According to Fredriksen (2000, 34), the choices regarding the sources for the life of Jesus are not between one Gospel (John) versus three (Matthew, Mark, Luke) but rather between one (John) and one (Mark), since Matthew and Luke are dependent on Mark. For the events after Jesus' arrest, she assumes preference should be given to the Johannine version above the Synoptic story (2000, 223–24). Her position differs from that of Sanders above, where Sanders is keenly alert to the insight that verisimilitude need not represent actual historicity. Rather, verisimilitude need not, in itself, represent actual historicity. The Johannine tradition speaks in its own voice.

The fine line these scholars walk reflects the nuanced tension that has developed around the issue of the Gospel of John as a source for the reconstruction of the life of Jesus. Can we really speak, though, of a "Return of John to Jesus Research" as D. Moody Smith claims (see his essay in this volume; also Smith 2001, 202)? Even in the period of "no quest" Bultmann indicated that certain facts in the Gospel of John are historical, but this does not imply that we therefore meet in John the historical Jesus. Bultmann's view did develop subtly over time, as earlier he declared that the Gospel of John could not be used for historical information (1925, 13) and yet later he believed that on occasion it could (1959, 841–42).

But these positions reflect older struggles within Johannine studies. We can safely say that the contemporary hypotheses on the origin of the Fourth Gospel and its historicity have been dealt with in Johannine exegesis in one form or another since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The tools with which schol-

ars can deal with the text grow ever more discerning, yet for all this growth the questions remain perplexingly the same. Rarely has there been any consensus in Johannine exegesis, either earlier or now. Johan Konings reaches the same conclusion in his historical overview of the literary criticism of the Johannine narrative:

There is still no consensus on the answer to a very important question: Was John himself an eyewitness (or acquainted with an eyewitness), and did he write the gospel independently whether or not he knew one or more of the other gospels? Or, is the Fourth Gospel nothing other than a midrash, an extremely free meditation on the synoptic tradition while the unique Johannine material was created by the evangelist or his community? Did John draw his stories from the traditions of congregations that existed on the perimeter of the greater Church, or did he notarise particularly valuable traditions coming from the not yet destroyed Jerusalem, the heart of the primitive church? Was the author of the Fourth Gospel a Hellenist—one who hardly knew Jewish customs, or was he an indigenous Jew—a Judean who could describe the geographic and chronological detail of Jesus' life and the growing Church far more concretely than the other evangelists. And lastly: Is the Fourth Gospel truly a "seamless robe", or could two, three, or even more, phases of composition and composers be discovered? (1972, 1:285–86)

There are two main variations on the theme of sources outside of the Synoptics: the Signs Source and the *Grundschrift*-hypothesis. The concept of a Signs Source is a still-valid idea to which many scholars adhere. Recently a major player in late twentieth-century historical Jesus research, John Dominic Crossan, proposed a variant on this theme: "an early miracles collection in Mark and John, with a fivefold sequence" among the sources for the reconstruction of the life of Jesus (1991, 310–13). Also recently, Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher have published a book in which four articles on the Signs Source appear (Fortna and Thatcher 2001). Despite its continued and articulate support, I remain wary along with Stephen S. Smalley about the existence of such a source and support his criticism:

The uncertainties contained in this literary excavation still remain, in my view, too numerous to allow it to act as a firm foundation for the hypothesis which has been built upon it by such scholars. The sources used by the fourth evangelist, especially if he were tapping traditions beneath all four Gospels, are presumably more fluid than a supposed and fixed "Signs document" ... might embrace. In the same way, even if the methods of stylometry may be a very sophisticated means of measuring the quantifiable literary characteristics of a document, an ancient text like the Fourth Gospel, as Felton and Thatcher admit, challenges the final results because of the very flexibility of the author's approach to his work. So what, I wonder, would John have made of the claim that he was writing according to a "univariate linear model"...? (2003, 248–49)

The second recent variation on the source theme is called the *Grundschrift*-hypothesis. Georg Richter (1977) championed this possibility starting in the

1970s and has been followed by his editor Josef Hainz and his students (Hainz 1992; 2002). It differs from the Signs Source theory in that it focuses more on the development of the Gospel in line with the development of the Johannine community. In fact, it includes the community's use of the Signs Source among other traditions. I will now give an overview of this theory to show how the search for sources reflects the search for the Evangelist and his proximity (or not) to the historical Jesus. The first stage of this hypothesis involves a group of Jews who saw Jesus as a prophet comparable to Moses. After being expelled from the synagogues of the Diaspora of Northern Palestine, Syria, and Transjordan they compiled a *Grundschrift* drawing from different traditions, including the Signs Source and a non-Synoptic passion story. The second stage would begin when a nucleus of this Jewish-Christian community developed a higher Christology and considered Jesus as the preexistent son of God who descended from heaven for the salvation of humanity. These Christians distinguished themselves from those who identified Jesus as the new Moses and rewrote the *Grundschrift* to express this new theological turn, for example including the Logos-hymn (1:1–13). The author of the modified *Grundschrift* could be called the Evangelist. In stage three, a further group of Christians who viewed Jesus as the Son of God interpreted the higher Christology of the Evangelist (phase 2) docetically: the divine origin of Jesus was so emphasized that he became a divine being whose physical appearance was merely an illusion. These Christians distinguished themselves from the Christians of the second phase. They accepted the Gospel of the Evangelist—they did not rework it—but interpreted it under the influence of Docetism. In the fourth and concluding phase, an antidocetic author rewrote the Gospel and added 1:14–18 and 19:34–35. This same author then wrote the first Johannine letter as an apologetic defense of Jesus as the Son of God who became flesh.

By outlining this theory in even this much detail, one can see the drive to cover all the points mentioned above by Konings. It is important to see how some scholars envision the possible layers of the text with developments within the community itself. The rather maddening quality of the Fourth Gospel is that diametrically opposed questions can be asked, and in fact answered in the affirmative, if a scholar is creative enough.

The complexity of these unending questions grows over time as the terms scholars use also take on vast levels of nuance. In the forest of opinions and hypotheses, almost every term receives a new meaning depending on the hypothesis within which it is used (Konings 1972, 1:286): (1) “tradition” is a loaded term that can refer to “historical tradition,” “Gemeindebildung,” or even a “heterodox origin”; (2) “redaction” can refer either to the hand of the Evangelist, the hand of an stubborn editor, or even to a falsifier, and can mean either “originality” or “inauthenticity”; (c) “Evangelist” can refer to a disciple of Jesus or an eyewitness to Jesus, or alternatively it can stand for an important interpretation of the church's tradition, a dramaturge, or an impassioned collector of different traditions. This can lead to the feeling of not seeing the forest for the trees.

However, one cannot use this complexity and the elusiveness of consensus as an excuse to reject literary criticism. Literary and historical criticisms are essential for the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. The Fourth Gospel will be more fully understood if we can discern whether John is a witness of his own tradition, which either confirms or contradicts the Synoptics, or whether it is an interpretation of the Synoptic tradition or, more specifically still, an interpretation of individual Synoptic Gospels. This question was born in the nineteenth century and remains with us in all its variety today.

In an attempt to address this question and its attendant issues, many scholars have turned to style criticism—and the literary criticism that emerges from questions about style—to analyze the Gospel. The methods and information gleaned from this process have been used to defend everything from a multitude of sources to literary unity. One of the few points of unanimity comes from the willingness of even most defenders of a Signs Source to acknowledge the stylistic unity of the Fourth Gospel, a unity that makes source reconstruction difficult. Those who use style criticism to try to prove the existence of one or more sources soon come to realize that other evidence must supplement such a claim. They also point out that homogeneous style is not itself a proof of literary unity. This is one of the first of three main literary-criticism rules for using style analysis.

The second rule states that non-Johannine terminology need not necessarily signal the use of a source or a reworking of the Gospel by an editor (Boismard and Lamouille 1977, 15; Boismard 1980, 26–27). The third rule points out that the more extensive the text under question, the more conclusive and stable an analysis using style criticism can be (Schnelle 1987, 173; 1992, 155). If a text is too short, then it can offer only limited evidence for hypotheses that one might want to build upon it. Given the shifty nature of especially the first two rules, the use of style characteristics obviously raises as many questions as it attempts to answer, if not more. Style criticism has often focused on word counts and similar gatherings of statistical information, but scholars have become increasingly aware that such numerical frequencies in themselves say nothing. They need interpretation to be relevant. Even then, the evidence for one or another position is rarely definitive but remains open for discussion. It is not the absolute uniqueness of a phenomenon that points to typical Johannine language but rather the exceptional frequency of the characteristic and the network of interconnections it establishes. Of these two characteristics, the development of networks may be more important than a word's frequent appearance.

The theory that I believe best answers this, which has recently been attributed to the “Louvain school,” can be summarized as John's dependence on the Synoptics without other more formal sources. Before diving into the premises of this methodology, I wish to dispel three important misconceptions about the so-called Louvain school. Neirynck discussed these in detail during a lecture in 1990. First he indicates that the name Louvain school can be misleading: “Johannine dependence on the Synoptics is not an idiosyncrasy of Leuven. Those who



call it the thesis of 'the Leuven school' should realize that this 'school' has its ramifications in Heidelberg, Mainz, Göttingen, Erlangen, Tübingen, and elsewhere" (1992, 8–9). Second, it has been generally accepted that "F. Neirynck rejects theories of 'unknown' and 'hypothetical' sources behind John, whether they are supposed to be written or oral" (Borgen 1988, 80). Neirynck answers:

The truth is that I am sceptical with regard to the classic source theories such as the signs source and a continuous pre-Johannine passion narrative, or the combination of both in a *Grundskrift* or signs gospel. But I am not aware that I ever gave such an exclusiveness to the Synoptic Gospels as to exclude John's use of oral-tradition or source material. In my reply to Dauer (1975) I expressly made the observation that "direct dependence on the Synoptic Gospels does not preclude the possibility of supplementary information." The phrase "not the sources of the Synoptic Gospels but the Synoptic Gospels themselves" has been used with reference to Jn 20,1–18, and I continue to regard this section as a pertinent test case for the thesis of Johannine dependence. (1992, 14)

Neirynck's position, then, has more nuance than often assumed by those challenging him. Building on the subtlety that he establishes above, Neirynck thinks that

the phenomenon of conflation and harmonization is already found in the Synoptic Gospels (in overlaps between Mark and Q), and that it is undeniably one of the characteristics of the early use of the canonical Gospels in the apocryphal literature. The identity of the fourth Evangelist is unknown to me, but, if we can suppose that he was a teacher and preacher in his community who knew the earlier Gospels, conflation and harmonization may have been quite natural to him. (1992, 15)

Next he responds to the allegation of D. Moody Smith, who declared that "it is not feasible to do redaction criticism on the premise of John's having written with the synoptic text(s) in view" (Smith 1990, 354). Neirynck states:

This is, I think, a central issue in the debate. Hypothetical source-reconstruction makes it possible to give a precise description of the Johannine redaction, words and phrases. This may be attractive, but it is no less hypothetical than the reconstruction of the source(s). Such a delineation of a redactional text in John cannot be expected in the hypothesis of dependence on the Synoptics. The Johannine redaction will appear to be a more complex process of gospel writing, but this complexity has its own attractiveness, at least to me. (1992, 15)

It is important to take Neirynck's nuancing of the Louvain school's thesis seriously. More scholars than just those at Leuven see merit in its proposals and are aware of the subtle distinctions it draws out. Wariness concerning a Signs Source or other sources does not mean that the Evangelist did not have other resources available to him and that he did not use everything at his disposal as a teacher

of the times and yet with his own consummate freedom and style. Neirynck is not shying away from the complexity and difficulty of Johannine redaction by defending this hypothesis but only trying to ground exegetical analysis in the few facts we have before us.

I now wish to describe some guidelines of the working hypothesis of the so-called Louvain school. (1) The Gospel of John must be compared first to the Synoptics, not only because they have the "Gospel genre" in common but also because they have structure and content in common, far more than with any other known, that is to say, not postulated, document (Konings 1972, 301). (2) Theological and historical research indicates with some certainty that the Gospel of John was written after the break with Judaism. This means that the literary dependence of the Synoptic Gospels cannot be threatened by an "early dating" of the Fourth Gospel (Konings 1972, 301). In the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher (1864; see 1997), Bleek (1862), and others defended an apostolic origin for John. This view has not entirely disappeared over the course of time, even under substantial attacks from various quarters. More recently John A. T. Robinson (1959) stated that he believed that the Gospel of John reached its final form around 65 C.E. In light of other research, however, the early dating hypothesis cannot hold up, despite its continued following. (3) From the study of the Synoptic Gospels it can be established that their authors went about their work freely and creatively. This means that "one must not restrict, from the start, the creativity of the Fourth Evangelist" (Selong 1971, 124–25). (4) When the differences between John and the Synoptics are being established, it is necessary to determine whether these do not reflect on the terminology, style, and motives characteristic of the Evangelist (Selong 1971, 125). (5) Particular attention needs to be given to "the author's vocabulary, grammar, style characteristics, literary tendencies (use of synonymous words, dramatization, parenthetical comments, etc.), themes, motives (of reminiscence, of misunderstanding, for instance), way of thinking, etc. as a means of ascertaining his possible employment of sources and possible transformation of those sources" (Selong 1971, 125). Note, however, that the "uniqueness of vocabulary which arises from uniqueness of subject matter does not necessarily indicate the presence of a special source" (Selong 1971, 126). These guidelines form a network for looking at questions concerning the Gospel of John and its historicity, but within this network tensions abound. For example, the importance of examining the Fourth Gospel first and foremost in light of the Synoptics is later made more complex by looking at the differences between them. These differences may not hint so much at another source as the Evangelist's own reflection on the Synoptics (be it their traditions or the Gospels themselves). It is these exact differences within the larger similarity that bear much of the burden of illuminating where John's concerns overlap with the Synoptics and where he develops themes left in the background by the others.

The working hypothesis described above along with Neirynck's sober defense of John's dependence on the Synoptics has formed my own research and guided

it through several different projects, all of which explore these same themes and questions. The fundamental principles of attempting to understand the text as we have it before us as well as a prudent reserve about postulating sources without sufficient reason have guided me with all the points mentioned above. First, in my 1985 book I studied John's "parentheses" or "asides" in detail. By means of these asides, John translates foreign words, explains Jewish customs, gives more precise information about certain people or about the time and place of a scene, comments on words and deeds of Jesus (or of others), and elucidates the Evangelist's intentions in elaborate reflections, both in the stories and the discourses in his Gospel. The fact of their bridging both the stories and the discourses provides an element of unity where often scholars see only radical difference. Following the methodology just outlined, I arrive at the following conclusions: (1) the language and style of the parentheses are identical with the language and style of the stories and discourses; (2) this linguistic homogeneity does not allow us to explain the asides as secondary insertions (explanations of the source by the Evangelist or comments from an ecclesiastical redactor or from an even later glossator, inserted after the completion of the Gospel); (3) these parentheses are rather to be ascribed to the hand of the Evangelist, explaining and commenting on his own Gospel story for his readers; (4) the parentheses directly reflect the point of view of the Evangelist: they form a key to the interpretation of the Gospel; and (5) the use of parentheses or asides is only one of the many literary devices used by the Evangelist to help his readers understand the story; he uses many other literary devices, such as repetitions.

Second, in my book on the Signs Source, after a careful analysis of the arguments for such a source, I note: "I am inclined to refuse the *sêmeia* hypothesis as a valid working hypothesis in the study of the Fourth Gospel" (Van Belle 1994, 376). Proponents of the *sêmeia* hypothesis, who see 20:30–31 as the end of a pre-Johannine Signs Source, do not sufficiently explain "why the evangelist revives the *sêmeion* concept at the very end of his account, when elsewhere it refers primarily to concrete miracle stories" (404). It seems unlikely that John would have written this important first conclusion without reflection. The term *sêmeia* in 20:30 has become a hermeneutical key to the whole Gospel and does not allow a source-critical conclusion. Defenders of the Signs Source have overlooked, it seems to me, two important aspects of Johannine writing: the unity between narrative and discourse; and John's use of synonymous expressions. By defending this unity, I would not deny that he used traditional material, but to some extent this material can be found in the Synoptic Gospel tradition and, as suggested in recent studies, in the Synoptic Gospels themselves.

A third project that orbits all the issues I have discussed above concentrates on the language and style of the Gospel. The Louvain research project titled "The Literary Unity of the Fourth Gospel: A Study of the Language and Style of the Fourth Evangelist with Special Attention to Repetitions and Variations" wishes to illustrate the homogeneity of the Fourth Gospel's language. It has taken the

repetitions and variations as its orientation, which literary criticism earlier used as a point of departure for its approach. Such a focus is important, but it also has a danger within it. As mentioned earlier in discussing style criticism, much of the information about repetitions and variations is initially statistical, based on word or form counts. This indispensable process, however, is only a step along the way. The results of such gleaning must themselves be analyzed to yield their wealth. It is conceivable that a crucial word could receive little mention yet be implicitly present throughout much of the story. This kind of information is more difficult, if not impossible, to quantify and must be taken into account through a more literary analysis of words, their contexts, and their networks as they ramify throughout the Gospel. The most significant results of our research can be formulated briefly as follows: the language and style of the Gospel is so homogenous and the craftsmanship of the Evangelist is of such a creative nature that it is impossible to distinguish alternative sources or traditions apart from the Synoptics. The homogenous christological and theological language of the Evangelist, his symbolism, and the structure of the text lead us to see, within the framework of Christology and soteriology, the word becoming flesh *within the belief of the Johannine community*: Jesus is the Messiah, the “Son of God,” who was sent to the world for our salvation.

In order to show this methodology in action, I would like to offer a brief, twofold analysis of a Johannine text. After a study of Johannine characteristics and the Synoptic parallels, I argue that the diptych of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples (20:19–23, 24–29) can be explained as a Johannine creation based on the Synoptic Gospels, in particular the Gospel of Luke. Some similar elements are, for example, the two different meetings with the disciples, Jesus’ greeting of “Peace be with you,” and his encouragement to see and to touch his hands and feet as evidence that it is truly he. I thus not only reject Boismard’s hypothesis that Luke is responsible for the final editing of John, but I also question the authors who maintain that Luke, in one form or another, used or knew the Gospel of John. If John was written after the Synoptic Gospels, as witnessed to by the church’s tradition, and if it is true that the Gospels were circulated with relative speed among the early congregations, then it stands to reason that the writing of the Gospel of John was influenced by the Gospel of Luke. The Lukan style characteristics present in John offer further substantiation: because the author of the Fourth Gospel was so well acquainted with the material of Luke, we come across—sometimes unexpectedly—Lukan style characteristics in his Gospel. While one could play devil’s advocate here, these facts remain possible and even likely interpretations of how the Gospels developed without any need to create hypothetical texts.

Not only does this section in John provide us with evidence for the Evangelist’s carrying over of Lukan style into his own work, but the two christological titles used by Thomas open to a broad vista within the Fourth Gospel. I believe that the two christological titles in the conclusion to the Gospel (“the Christ, the

Son of God"; 20:31) and in the confession of Thomas ("My Lord and my God"; 20:28) should be read within the framework established by the distribution of christological titles throughout the Gospel. The conclusion to the Gospel together with the appearances of Jesus to the eleven disciples and the confession of Thomas, who proclaims that Jesus is our Lord and God on behalf of all the disciples and as example for all the faithful, represent the climax of the entire Gospel. Further, I indicate that the two christological titles in 20:31 should be read first in relation to the two titles within the confession of Thomas in 20:28. In this way, Thomas's confession immediately becomes the call of the faithful. As is typical of the Evangelist, if something is significant in the end, it is probable that similar terms or concepts may be significant in the beginning. Indeed, these four titles in 20:28 and 20:31 have been deliberately integrated throughout the Gospel, starting from the first chapter, which is a virtual seedbed of christological titles. But the confession of Thomas and the intention of the conclusion to the Gospel are clearly related to the events that took place throughout Jesus' life and the role of his disciples therein: he manifested himself as Messiah, Son of God, by the gift of the Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. In John's Gospel, the preexistent and divine Messiah is the one who takes away the sins of humankind by his reconciliatory death on the cross. He alone is capable of granting salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the divine life associated therewith (Schnackenburg 1965, 1:304–5). The conclusion to the Gospel, with the confession of Thomas, harkens back to the first chapter, thereby forming an all-embracing inclusion based on christological titles. Therefore, I cannot accept Murray Harris's suggestion on the genesis of Thomas's confession: "In his attempt to depict the significance of the risen Jesus for himself personally, Thomas used a liturgical form ultimately drawn from the LXX, which later came to serve admirably as the crowning Christological affirmation of the Fourth Gospel, as a confessional formula in the church, and as a rebuttal of the imperial cult" (1992, 121). It does not spring out of nowhere, as Harris's claim would suggest. The christological titles are woven throughout the Gospel and so unite it into an organic whole. They do not appear jammed into the text from the outside, as if the Evangelist was forcing two texts or even separate approaches together. They appear in harmony with the theology that he presents in each case. All of this repetition and variation of titles builds a network that reflects John's own logic.

All three of my research projects have discovered and defended, in one way or another, the artistry of the Fourth Gospel and the unity that flows from it. This unity of style and theological reflection makes the discernment of sources very slippery work. This does not mean that other theories do not bring up valid points and questions that must be taken seriously and addressed. But the crafting of the Gospel of John admits of few cracks and crevices.

On the basis of my research, I can neither deny nor prove the possibility of historical traditions in the Fourth Gospel. For these reasons, I can accept the point of view of Christopher M. Tuckett on the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel:

These differences [i.e., between John and the Synoptics] make it very difficult to see both John and the Synoptics as equally accurate reflections of the historical Jesus. ... Most would agree that a focus on the kingdom of God, and extensive use of parables, are the most characteristic aspects of Jesus' teaching. Further, a move from a more original theocentric focus of Jesus' teaching (with God and God's kingly rule as central) to a later christocentric focus (on the importance of the person of Jesus himself) seems easier to envisage than the reverse process. Hence the teaching of the historical Jesus is likely to be more accurately reflected in the synoptic tradition than in John's Gospel. This does not mean that John's Gospel is historically worthless in terms of any quest for the historical Jesus. Some details of John's account appear more historically plausible than the synoptic accounts and may well be historical. (2001, 126–27)

For the time being, a consensus on the subject of sources and historicity of the Gospel of John still eludes us. It seems that we must continue to enjoy our dialogue with its lack of definitive consensus and the Fourth Gospel's unending capacity to foster both sides of the discussion.

# MEMORY HOLDS THE KEY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF MEMORY IN THE INTERFACE OF HISTORY AND THEOLOGY IN JOHN

*John Painter*

Craig Blomberg argues that an assessment of the significance of historical tradition in John's Gospel is dependent on the view of authorship adopted. He gives priority to the external evidence in establishing authorship and emphasizes the unanimity of the tradition in identifying John *bar* Zebedee as the Beloved Disciple and author of this Gospel. From this perspective, he is inclined to accept the historical reliability of John's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> An important task undertaken in Craig Keener's recent commentary is the evaluation of the historical tradition in John.<sup>2</sup> In his preface he rightly recognizes, "Most scholars (including myself) agree that John adapts his material more freely than any of the Synoptics." Further, "John's relative lack of overlap with the Synoptics makes the degree of his adaptation difficult to examine." As a consequence, "In contrast with the Synoptics, which lend themselves more readily to historical-critical examination, John weaves his sources together so thoroughly that they usually remain shrouded behind his completed document" (2003, xxvii). "The different [from the Synoptics] portrait of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel suggests that John has taken more sermonistic liberties in his portrayal of Jesus." Nevertheless, he concludes, "but this does not demonstrate that he lacks historical tradition on which the portrayal is based" (2003, 51). I argue, "In spite of this monolithic unity, almost all of the important Johannine themes can be found, in seed form, in the Synoptics" (Painter 1975, 7).

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1. See Craig L. Blomberg 2001. Although B. F. Westcott argued that John the apostle was the Beloved Disciple and author of the Gospel, he accepts the tradition that the Gospel was written when John was an old man living in Ephesus in a church that was no longer dominantly Jewish. For him the Gospel was written for Christians of all nations, this being the character of the church of John's time. Westcott makes no attempt to base an argument of historicity on his conclusion of eyewitness authorship.

2. Craig Keener 2003, 11–12; a massive work of 1,636 pages!

But this sort of contact with tradition does not demonstrate the historicity of the narrative within which fragments of tradition are detected.

Keener attempts to move in this direction when he accepts the thesis of Richard Burridge, who clarifies the character of Greco-Roman *bioi* (lives or biographies, as we call them) and argues that John and the Synoptics fit somewhere in the continuum of this genre.<sup>3</sup> He accepts that John's "audience would certainly recognize a correspondence between John's Jesus and the risen Lord" (2003, xxvii), which leads him to ask, "where on the continuum of ancient biographies does this Gospel fit?" At the same time, he accepts David Aune's conclusion that ancient biography "was still firmly rooted in historical fact rather than literary fiction" (2003, 13; see Aune 1988). Thus, "although biographies could serve a wide range of literary functions, ancient biographers intended their works to be more historical than novelistic" (2003, 12). He goes on to say of John, "its divergence from dependence on Synoptic tradition makes most of its contents impossible to verify (or falsify) on purely historical grounds." Because "John falls into the general category of biography, however, [it] at least shifts the burden of proof on the matter of reported events . . . onto those who deny John's use of tradition for the events he describes, although the historical method cannot check the accuracy of most of his individual details" (2003, 51). But given that the genre is represented by a continuum from the strongly historical to the novelistic, John needs to be placed at the historical end of the continuum.

Like Blomberg, Keener moves to establish John's credibility, arguing that, if its author or the author of a nucleus of its tradition was an eyewitness of Jesus, John stands a step closer to the historical Jesus than the Synoptics. Thus the question of authorship is important for determining where this Gospel fits within the continuum of the treatment of history in ancient biographies (2003, 52). Certainly an eyewitness author makes independent historical tradition a possibility. However, an eyewitness does not guarantee historical accuracy. It would mean that John might contain valuable historical tradition quite independent of the Synoptics and not known to us there.<sup>4</sup> As Keener acknowledges, the problem is to identify and establish that this is the case. If we cannot do this on historical grounds, we cannot be confident that John's Gospel puts us in touch with the historical Jesus rather than John's understanding of the risen Lord. The appeal to ancient biography is of doubtful value. If John's "audience would certainly recognize a correspondence between John's Jesus and the risen Lord" (cited above), this kind of ancient biography is of a questionable historical character. An appeal to this genre generally as a way of establishing historical reliability involves a confusion of categories and a failure to distinguish the standards of ancient from modern biography; an appeal to an eyewitness author cannot change that.

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3. Keener refers to Richard Burridge 1992, 63–67, 104–239.

4. On the relation of John to the Synoptics, see D. Moody Smith 2001.



I have come to the conclusion that, even if the author was a disciple of Jesus, he shows great freedom in the interpretation of the tradition. Such freedom is not inconsistent with an author with firsthand knowledge of the history attested in the tradition. Like the life of Jesus, the life of Socrates poses problems for those who wish to know about him. Neither left any written records of his own. When Socrates died as a consequence of a judicial death sentence at an age of just over seventy, the only written records were the caricatures by the famous comic poets Aristophanes, Amipsias, and Eupolis. Their works come from the period when Socrates was about fifty. Of their works the brilliant caricature by Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, survives. These works are not history or biography, but they let us know that Socrates was already a notorious figure who was open to popular attack by caricature, which not only depends on contact with reality but is also a deep distortion of it.

Other writings about Socrates are from the period after his trial and death and bear the marks of the deep impression made by that heroic tragedy. Two of those who wrote were Plato and Xenophon, each about forty years younger than Socrates and thus familiar only with the later Socrates. Each wrote quite a different account. Xenophon presents a prosaic and conventional Socrates who could hardly have provoked the citizens of Athens to call for his death. Plato's Socrates is sharp witted, a satirist and profound metaphysician with a deep grasp of the most advanced science of the time. The question is: Did Xenophon conventionalize Socrates, or did Plato use Socrates as the mouthpiece of his own philosophical mind and method? Each interpreted Socrates in the light of his trial and death. My suspicion is that Plato used Socrates as his own mouthpiece, believing that he owed his method and its fruits to Socrates. Such a conviction might have allowed considerable freedom to Plato, whose free interpretation may be a more authentic understanding of Socrates than we find in Xenophon. In the case of these two scholars who knew Socrates, the problem is to find evidence to support our conclusions. Might this analogy shed light on John's account of Jesus? <sup>5</sup>

The form of John is not the result of the Evangelist's use of a tradition that has run wild.<sup>6</sup> Rather, in a vision inspired by the Easter faith, the Evangelist has made interpretative use of Synoptic-like tradition.<sup>7</sup> It is not so much the tradition used that separates John from the Synoptics. Rather, the evidence of the Gospel points to the interpretative role of the Evangelist who, according to Keener, has woven "his sources together so thoroughly that they usually remain shrouded behind his

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5. The importance Plato gives to memory is comparable to its place in John, though there are significant differences in their understandings of the nature of memory and its function.

6. *Pace* Ernst Käsemann 1968, 36.

7. The Synoptic-like character of the tradition was a major conclusion of C. H. Dodd's *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (1963). That John's readers "would certainly recognize a correspondence between John's Jesus and the risen Lord" is acknowledged by Keener 2003, xxvii.

completed document" (2003, xxvii). I would prefer to say that John has so internalized and assimilated his sources to his own idiom that they are rarely visible.

#### THE HERMENEUTICAL PRIORITY OF THE DATA OF THE GOSPEL

In reading the Fourth Gospel, the data within it should take priority over theories of authorship based largely on external evidence that is not very early or consistent. That evidence comes to us first through Irenaeus (ca. 180 C.E.), who says that Matthew was the first of the written Gospels and was written in Hebrew while Peter and Paul were still alive. After their deaths Mark wrote down the preaching of Peter, and Luke wrote down the gospel preached by Paul. Then, last of the four, John, identified as the Beloved Disciple, is said to have published his Gospel while residing in Ephesus (*Haer.* 3.1.1; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.2–4). Eusebius attributes a similar view to Clement of Alexandria (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.4b–7). Despite some differences, each account names John as chronologically the last of the four Gospels.<sup>8</sup> Clement says, "John, last of all, conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the [other] Gospels, was urged by his disciples and, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel."<sup>9</sup> This implies that John knew of the other Gospels but falls short of saying that he used them in writing his own Gospel. The main point is to distinguish John from the other Gospels. They deal with the physical details (τὰ σωματικά), while John, divinely moved by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel (πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον). Whether the contrast is based on an early tradition is uncertain; it looks more like an attempt to explain and justify (defend) the difference of John from the other Gospels.<sup>10</sup>

C. H. Dodd allows for the possibility of this Gospel's authorship by John the son of Zebedee, although he considers this improbable.<sup>11</sup> In that event he argues,

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8. Irenaeus makes Matthew first but does not indicate the order of Mark and Luke. He says only that they were written down after the deaths of Peter and Paul, while Matthew was published while they were still in Rome. It may be that Mark is thought to be second, being mentioned before Luke, but the order is not explicit. Clement, by saying that the Gospels with genealogies were first, makes both Matthew and Luke prior to Mark but without indicating the order of Matthew and Luke. For Irenaeus, Mark was written after the death of Peter; according to Clement, it was while Peter was still alive. For both Irenaeus and Clement, John is last.

9. Clement attributes his account of the order of the Gospels to the "primitive elders" (ἀνέκαθεν πρεσβυτέρων). Whether this makes his account independent of Irenaeus (who appealed to the elders of Asia Minor) is unclear.

10. Compare Papias's justification of the difference of Mark from Matthew, as recorded by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.13–16. Papias is at pains to explain the differences by attributing them to the nature of the oral preaching of Peter and affirming that Mark provided a faithful record. Similarly, Clement explains the differences between John and the Synoptics. We may suspect that such explanations have no good traditional basis. Reference to John as a spiritual Gospel may well be the result of contrasting it with the Synoptics.

11. While the Gospel attributes substantial authorship to the Beloved Disciple (21:20–24),

The material ascribed here to tradition would turn out to be the apostle's own reminiscences; but even so, it would be obvious that they had been cast at one stage into the mould of the corporate tradition of the Church—and why should they not be, if the apostle was actively immersed in just that ministry of preaching, teaching and liturgy which *ex hypothesi* gave form to the substance of the Church's memories of its Founder? (1963, 17 n. 1)

Thus Dodd insists that the evidence of the Gospel itself takes priority over hypotheses based on theories of authorship. Plato's account of Socrates shows that a firsthand account may nevertheless be deeply reflective and interpretative. Like Dodd, I think this is true of John, although I think there is more room for recognizing the role of individual inspired interpretation than Dodd allows in the quotation above. In his earlier book, Dodd had recognized that John, like the Synoptics and Paul, presupposes the development of early Christianity but that the formulation of John is not explained by the Evangelist's knowledge of the other Gospels or the writings of Paul. The Synoptics provide only a partial parallel, while Paul develops similar areas as John but uses a different vocabulary and conceptual framework (see Dodd 1953, 4–6). Thus John is not to be conceived as a Paulinist (*pace* Goulder 1994, 40–42, 44, 74, 93, 94). Our task is to give some account of the interpretative character of the Gospel and the challenges involved for those who would use it to set out an account of the historical Jesus. The Gospel could contain traditions based on firsthand knowledge of the Evangelist. But even if this view is correct, it does not guarantee the factual character of the Johannine narrative.

Even narratives containing references to historically verifiable sites only show familiarity with Jerusalem in Jesus' day. The reference to the pool with five porches (John 5:2) has long been identified with the pool at St. Anne's Church in Old Jerusalem (see Jeremias 1949, 9–26). Reference to the pool is followed by an Aramaic identification in transliteration (Βηθζαθά). Both the reference and the transliteration are uncertain because of textual variants. Minimally, evidence like this shows that John was familiar with the Jerusalem of Jesus' day. The same is probably true of the reference to "the Pavement" (λιθόστρωτον), in Aramaic transliteration, Γαββαθα (19:13). The common pattern of reference suggests

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it does so through the corporate testimony of unidentified witnesses, and the identity of the Beloved Disciple remains hidden. Had the Beloved Disciple been the pillar apostle, John the son of Zebedee (see Gal 2:9), he would not have needed the support of anonymous witnesses to the reliability of his witness. For this and other reasons, I identify the Beloved Disciple with one of the two unnamed disciples of John 21:2, who may not have been members of the Twelve. Alternatively, the Beloved Disciple might be an ideal figure, as Bultmann thought and has been argued more recently by Andrew Lincoln 2002 and 2004. Against this view, I think John 21 embodies Johannine tradition appended to the Gospel by the corporate witnesses (the Johannine school) after the death of the Beloved Disciple.

that the author was attempting to signal an identifiable location in each case. But do such references substantiate the historicity of the stories in which they are embedded? Not necessarily! They may show only familiarity with pre-70 C.E. Jerusalem. We need to look further to see if the stories bear the marks of early tradition. In the case of John 5, the healing story is much like other stories in the Synoptics but is probably not to be identified with any of them. It is probably an independent Synoptic-like tradition drawn on by John, with marks of Johannine editing and interpretation, at least at the beginning and the end. The introduction about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews is strongly Johannine and can bear no weight in a reconstruction of Jesus' ministry. Then at the end of the story we are told that it was the Sabbath on that day (5:9c). This is also a characteristically Johannine technique of story development (see also 9:13–14, following the story of the healing of the blind man, in contrast to the Markan Sabbath conflict stories, where the Sabbath context is identified at the beginning: Mark 1:21; 2:23; 3:1–2). I suspect that the Sabbath context has been introduced into the healing stories of John 5 and 9 in order to develop the conflict scenes that follow. By withholding the Sabbath reference until the end of the healing story the Evangelist has also produced a powerful dramatic effect. While the stories themselves seem to be traditional, there are marks of significant interpretative modifications, which might also modify what appears to be traditional. Certainly the dialogue and discourse elements of these two chapters bear the marks of profound Johannine interpretation in the light of the Easter faith.

The appearance of Synoptic-like nuggets of material within John's Gospel suggests that John draws on historical tradition, which is sometimes multiply attested by John and one or more of the Synoptics or their sources. Even where the nugget is only Synoptic-like, there may be a case for identifying early tradition, a position best known in the work of C. H. Dodd (1963; see also Barnabas Lindars 1971). That such strongly Johannized material should yield evidence of a Synoptic-like substratum suggests that the Synoptic tradition remains closer to the underlying historical tradition than John. This is true whether or not John is dependent on the Synoptics in the fundamental composition of the Gospel. Although I think John is fundamentally independent of the Synoptics, I leave open the possibility that John might have known one or more of the Synoptics in the later stages of the composition of the Gospel. Like D. Moody Smith (2001), I think John is independent of the Synoptics in the fundamental shaping of the Gospel. As Dodd argued, the nuggets of tradition used to develop the Johannine themes are probably independent of the Synoptics. John also responded to traditions found in the Synoptics but not explicitly in John, such as rumors about Jesus' birth and the account of his baptism by John. Again this shows John's awareness of tradition, but not necessarily that of the Synoptics.

There is a qualitative difference between John and the Synoptics. The Johannine Jesus does not speak with the same voice as the Jesus of the Synoptics, and the course of Jesus' mission is quite different in John and the Synoptics, although

each begins with John the Baptist and ends in Jerusalem with Jesus' execution and resurrection. The tradition of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics is drawn from multiple independent sources that stand together over against the teaching of Jesus in John. The itinerary of Jesus' ministry is another matter. It is largely a matter of John against Mark, whose itinerary is generally followed by the other two Gospels. There is a case for adopting John's longer term of Jesus' ministry, although it must be admitted that the festivals in John, which give Jesus' ministry its temporal and geographical shape, have a theological significance for John's narrative. Michael Goulder has made a case for the theological ordering of John 2–4, undermining confidence in the placement of the temple incident in John 2:13–22.<sup>12</sup> All this gives evidence of strong theological interpretation in John. This need not mean that John is an arbitrary presentation of the story of Jesus. Rather, the evidence suggests that John is a radical interpretation of the Jesus tradition in which the Evangelist is so certain of his understanding of Jesus that he freely transmits the tradition, providing insight in his own words. The narrator (Evangelist), Jesus, and John (the Baptist) all speak with the same voice; indeed, the voices of Jesus and John sometimes fade into the voice of the narrator (see 3:10–21, 27–36). There is nothing comparable to this phenomenon in the Synoptics. John is more concerned about the truth of the *message* of the Gospel that illuminates the identity and significance of Jesus than with accurate factual details. Yet it is wrong to suggest that John is all interpretation/theology and the Synoptics straight history. Here I make use of an extended extract from my 1975 book, to which footnotes have been added.

What kind of book is the Gospel of John? It is a profound interpretation of the gospel events. But it is not true to say that John gives a developed theology while the other Gospels give us the gospel history. We need to take account of the theology of the Synoptics and the historical content of John. Each of the Evangelists was a theologian in his own right. In John theological reflection has progressed beyond the limits of the Synoptics. It has reached a stage where the sources can no longer be detected with any certainty. Discourse and narrative are expressed in the same style and bear the impress of the mind of the evangelist.<sup>13</sup> In spite of this monolithic unity, almost all of the important Johannine themes can be found, in seed form, in the Synoptics.

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12. See M. Goulder 1992, who attributes the development of the themes in John 2–4 to the Evangelist. The section deals thematically with new wine, new temple, new birth, new worshipers, and new life. New temple (2:13–22) finds a matching correlation with new worshipers in spirit and truth (4:19–26). Recognition of strong Johannine theological development in this material and its arrangement casts doubt on the historicity of this aspect of Johannine chronology.

13. Craig Keener agrees (2003, 47). To support this view, he appeals to the work of Richard Burridge (1997, 527). I considered it to be a well-established position when I wrote my *John: Witness and Theologian* (1975).

John develops isolated sayings into major themes, for example concerning "the new Temple," "new birth," "eternal life," the faith of discipleship, the person and work of Christ [Jesus].<sup>14</sup> But John's use of language differs from the Synoptics. The kingdom of God, so central in the Synoptics, is mentioned only in John 3:3, 5. This is because his main emphasis is on the complementary themes of the person and work of Christ [Jesus] and the experience of salvation. Because of this perspective, John ranks with Paul as one of the leading theologians of the New Testament. It is the genius of John that he gave expression to his theology in the form of the Gospel. But, unlike Mark, John does not refer to his book as a Gospel. In fact he does not use gospel terminology at all. His book certainly is a Gospel. But where does the gospel tradition end, and where does faith take over the theme?<sup>15</sup> What is the relation between history and theology in John?

Totally objective historical writing is not possible. Event and interpretation are inextricably bound together because bare events are meaningless. Events have meaning only when they are understood in a context. Thus events may be understood in different ways. The event remains unchanged, but it is understood from different perspectives.<sup>16</sup> This point is crucial for understanding the nature of the Gospel of John.<sup>17</sup>

John is a Gospel. It contains a historical account of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and presents these events as good news. But unlike the Synoptics, John does not appear to be a collection of traditional material, edited and fitted together. John exhibits a freedom of composition. This statement needs to be balanced by John's strong emphasis on witness....

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14. I have come to view the reference to "Christ" as true to Paul but inappropriate in relation to John, for whom "Jesus" is normal and for whom Jesus is the Christ (Messiah); see 1:41; 4:29; 7:26, 41; 11:27; 20:31; and 1 John 3:22; 5:1. In what I consider to be later strands of John (1:17; 17:3), we find "Jesus Christ," which is also found in 1 John 1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 4:2, 15; 5:6, 20; 2 John 3, 7. Unlike Paul, John nowhere refers to Jesus simply as "Christ," although this use is found in 2 John 9. Even here the use is probably different; Christ is used with the definite article and may mean "the Christ," that is, the Messiah. In this Gospel, where (alone in the New Testament) the meaning of Christ is explained by the transliteration of its Semitic root (1:41; 4:25), the Pauline use of Christ seems to be unthinkable.

15. While all four Gospels are written under the impact of Easter faith, the rate of the transformation of the tradition is not uniform in all Gospels, and we may need to take account of John as chronologically last of the four.

16. Bultmann dealt with this under the heading of "Point of View" in 1958, 11–19. See also his essays on hermeneutics (1955a) and exegesis (1957). Thus Bultmann recognized the distinctive and personal point of view (in a limited sense, an autobiographical perspective) of all historical testimony, although he did not thereby ignore historical reality but spoke of such testimony as a dialogue with history.

17. Of the Gospels, only John makes clear the epistemological distance between the time of Jesus' ministry and the postglorification period in which the Gospel was written (see 2:22; 7:39; 12:16; 16:7, 13–16), emphasizing the importance of the sending of the Paraclete/Spirit of Truth and the transformation of memory (14:16–17, 26; 16:12–15).

Understanding the Gospel is complicated by the fact that it has been written from the standpoint of two different perspectives.<sup>18</sup> Time and again the Gospel presents a profound understanding of the person of Jesus and then indicates that the disciples failed to understand his significance. This is because the Gospel was written from the perspective of faith, which issued from the glorification of Jesus, but it describes the situation of Jesus' ministry. The Gospel operates at two levels. There is the level of understanding that was possible in the days of Jesus' ministry and that which was possible after his glorification.

Jesus' glorification and the coming of the Paraclete are related events. Together they were instrumental in bringing a renewed understanding of old events (2:22; 12:16; 7:37ff.; 16:7, 13–16). As a witness, John retains the perspective of the disciples' failure to understand Jesus, but at the same time he indicates that the record of the same events, which were misunderstood by the disciples, can now evoke authentic faith. Thus, while showing what the words and works of Jesus mean for faith, he continues to emphasize the misunderstanding Jesus encountered.

Misunderstanding is a recurring motif in the Gospel. Not only the disciples, but also almost every person or group coming in contact with Jesus, is shown to have misunderstood his words and works. The misunderstanding motif has its roots in history. Jesus was misunderstood. Misunderstanding arose because Jesus was thought of in traditional Messianic terms....

The misunderstanding motif also illustrates a theological point. Jesus' glorification and the coming of the Paraclete were necessary events to bring about true understanding. But perhaps the pedagogical function is even more important. Why did John bother to record Jesus' words if they were always misunderstood? He records Jesus' words and works with the response of misunderstanding in order to remove the misunderstandings, which persisted in an age when authentic understanding had become possible. (Painter 1975, 7–9)

The evidence of John suggests that its significantly different (from the Synoptics) portrayal of Jesus is a consequence of Johannine interpretation. Three converging points lead to this conclusion: (1) Dodd and others have isolated nuggets of Synoptic-like tradition at the heart of many Johannine developments; (2) There is a stylistic unity to the Gospel as a whole, in discourse and narrative; and (3) Jesus, the narrator, and John the Baptist all share a common viewpoint and express it in the Johannine idiom, which differs from the Synoptics and the Synoptic Jesus. We are led to the role of the Evangelist, who shapes this distinctive Gospel and provides a rationale for the differences.

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18. This observation is developed in relation to the Johannine theme of memory in what follows.



## MEMORY HOLDS THE KEY

At significant points in the Gospel the Evangelist deals with growth in understanding in relation to the phenomenon of memory. From ancient time the phenomenon of memory has been the subject of reflection and study. The complexity of memory can be seen in distinctions between memory and the failure to remember, faulty or inaccurate memory, and developing memory, which might be faulty or bring a deepened understanding. Some of these distinctions draw attention to individual and corporate memory. Recently my attention was drawn to a research project at La Trobe University in which a fundamental distinction is made between two phases or processes in memory. First there is "consolidation," which "is the encoding of the original memory of the event at the time that it first happened." Then there is "reconsolidation," which "is the process whereby the original memory changes as we recall and re-examine the memory at a later time ... [which] allows the new context in which the memory is recalled to alter and add to the original memory." Further, "it is possible to identify a series of stages in the biochemical processing of memory."<sup>19</sup> My work on memory in John leading to the publication of my 1975 book fits well with this research. It was stimulated to some extent by the work of Birger Gerhardsson in a series of publications beginning in 1961 with *Memory and Manuscript* (2nd ed., 1964). While this work was seminal, the broad response showed that Gerhardsson's notion of a closely controlled transmission of oral tradition was impossible to substantiate. Although Gerhardsson subsequently nuanced his view, his work failed to have the influence that his emphasis on the role of oral tradition merited. Then in 2002 James Dunn announced the reopening of the question of the importance of oral tradition in the quest of the historical Jesus.<sup>20</sup> This paper proved to be his first shot fired to announce his forthcoming contribution to the debate on the historical Jesus. That volume has now appeared under the title *Jesus Remembered*.<sup>21</sup> In it Dunn redefined the historical Jesus as "the remembered Jesus," so bringing memory back onto center stage in Jesus research. In a paper dealing with the question of the Johannine contribution to historical Jesus studies, it is appropriate to turn our attention to the Johannine treatment of memory.<sup>22</sup>

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19. Ernest Raetz 2006, 5. The article introduces the research project on memory of Professor Simon Crowe, Head of the School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University.

20. He did this in his Presidential Address to the 2002 Meeting of *Studiorum Novi Testament Societas* (in Durham, 6–10 August), which was published in *NTS* under the title "Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisioning Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition" (2003a).

21. Dunn 2003b. It is the first volume in a projected three volumes dealing with *Christianity in the Making*, covering the period 27–150 C.E.

22. After my paper was given at the 2004 SBL meeting in San Antonio, two books focusing on social memory have appeared: the Semeia Studies collection on memory, tradition, and text



John's use of *μνημονεύειν* (15:20; 16:4, 21) overlaps the Synoptic use of this verb as well as their use of *μυμνήσκεσθαι* and its compound forms. The Synoptic usage favors various forms of *μυμνήσκεσθαι* but does not suggest any distinct meaning compared with their use of *μνημονεύειν*.

Using *μνημονεύειν* in John 15:20 and 16:4, Jesus calls on the disciples to remember what he had said. In 15:20 he tells them to remember what he has said in 13:16, and in 16:4 he says that when the things he has been speaking of happen they will remember that he had told them in advance so that they would be prepared.<sup>23</sup> These two uses of *μνημονεύειν* emphasize accurate memory of the past. Jesus prepares the disciples for the future, and their memory of his words will sustain them.

This is the way the Synoptics treat memory also. The theme of accurate memory of Jesus and his teaching provides a basis for looking for reliable historical tradition. Jesus asks the disciples, "Do you not remember [*μνημονεύετε*] the five loaves and the five thousand and how many baskets [of fragments] you gathered up?" and similarly concerning the seven loaves and the four thousand (Mark 8:18–19; Matt 16:9). This is a matter of testing the disciples on details narrated in each of these Gospels, and the disciples give the correct answer. Likewise, in Luke 17:32 Jesus tells the disciples, "Remember Lot's wife." This is in the context of the warning not to look back, as Lot's wife did. Such references to memory (including John 15:20; 16:4) concern accurate recall of events or words narrated in the Gospels or the Scriptures. The same is true of the Synoptic use of various forms of *μυμνήσκεσθαι* in the recollection attributed to Peter (Mark 14:72; Matt 26:75; Luke 22:61). There we are told that Peter remembered the word of Jesus. His recall was triggered by the predicted cockcrow and, in the case of Luke, also when, at the cockcrow, Jesus turned and looked intently at Peter. Jesus' prediction of his denial is recorded in all four Gospels (Mark 14:30; Matt 26:34; Luke 22:34; John 13:38), but reference to Peter's remembering the prediction is found only in the Synoptics. The force of the denial was reinforced by the recall of the warning prediction. This is accurate memory recall according to the Gospels.

Luke 24:6–8 provides an interesting example where the message to women is, "Remember how he spoke with you while you were in Galilee," and reference is made to the saying that the Son of Man must be handed over into the hands of sinful people and be crucified and rise on the third day (24:7). The saying is identifiable with a number of predictions in the Synoptics (including Luke 9:22; 17:25;

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edited by Thatcher and Kirk (2005), and Thatcher's expanded contribution to that volume into his monograph on why John wrote a Gospel (2006).

23. In 16:21 Jesus tells the disciples that the joy of seeing him again will obliterate the memory of the afflictions that they will face in the meantime in the same way as the joy of giving birth obliterates the mother's memory of the tribulation of labor in childbirth. Present joy overwhelming the memory of past sorrow is an aspect of the transformation of memory in its selectivity. What is obliterated is an accurate memory of the past sorrow.

18:32–33). Luke 24:7 is a composite reference to Luke's record of Jesus' teaching on the subject. As a result of the reminder, Luke tells us, the women remembered. While this is significant teaching, it is accurate recall of Jesus' Galilean teaching according to Luke. If Jesus predicted his own suffering, death, and resurrection, this recall is no different from the other references. Many scholars think the predictions are *ex eventu*. If this is the case, the Synoptics present a later teaching as accurate memory of what Jesus taught. This would move in the direction of the Johannine approach but is less pervasive and differs from John's explicit introduction of postresurrection, postglorification, spirit-inspired understanding memory into the narrative of Jesus' ministry, and there is a distinctive and carefully developed treatment of memory in John. It is found in the Evangelist's use of the deponent *μυμήσκεσθαι* (2:17, 22; 12:16) and the compound form of the active *ὑπομνήσκειν* (14:26). Here the Evangelist deals with the transformation of memory. John's three uses of *μυμήσκεσθαι* and his single use of the active form of the compound *ὑπομνήσκειν* express the transformation of memory, or the transformation of understanding in memory, in a way quite different from his use of *μνημονεύειν*. The evidence of the Gospel confirms that this transformation of memory has recast the Gospel as a whole, even if the reader is alerted to this only at certain decisive points in the Gospel.

#### JESUS REMEMBERED

Bultmann's work on the historical Jesus identified the earliest stratum of the Synoptic tradition as the basis for a picture of Jesus that most probably goes back to Jesus. At this point, I find James Dunn's *Jesus Remembered* sympathetic to Bultmann's position on the historical Jesus,<sup>24</sup> yet their approaches to the sources are quite different. The agreement is found in Dunn's redefinition of the historical Jesus as "the remembered Jesus" (2003b, 335, 882) and Bultmann's identification of the earliest layer of the Synoptic tradition with the memory of Jesus of the earliest Palestinian community (see Bultmann 1958, 16–18).

From the context of this agreement, there are serious differences between Bultmann and Dunn in establishing just where we may find the historical Jesus remembered. For Bultmann it is in the earliest layer of the Synoptic tradition, because he discerned a process of the transformation of the Jesus tradition in the power of the Easter faith, the resurrection faith. The transformation of the disciples' perception of Jesus through the Easter faith was not instantaneously complete. Thus Bultmann attempts to isolate the earliest layer of the Synoptic tradition. Alternatively, Dunn stresses the continuity between the church and Jesus.

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24. Dunn makes a massive contribution to the quest for the historical Jesus, but there can be no attempt to evaluate the overall contribution of the book here. See my review of his book (Painter 2004).

His method is to lay out what the Synoptic Gospels characteristically portray of the ministry and teaching of Jesus as representative of the historical Jesus. Thus he does not seek to base his reconstruction on the establishment of the authenticity of individual sayings or incidents but by the overall consistency within the sources on the assumption that the tradition was formed by the impact of Jesus during his ministry (Dunn 2003b, 332, 335). He describes his approach in terms of the "critical realism" developed by Bernard Lonergan and adopted by Ben Meyer and N. T. Wright (2003b, 110–11). This alerts the reader to the closeness of Wright and Dunn in their approaches. Each assumes the fundamental continuity between Jesus and the church, Jesus and the Gospels. But Dunn differs from Wright in his emphasis on the role of oral tradition. For Dunn, recognition of the oral process of transmission makes sense of the witness of the Gospels to Jesus. Throughout the substance of the book he sets out the parallel witness of the Gospels to Jesus in order to demonstrate the stable core of the tradition in the midst of the vitality and diversity of multiple performances. Not only the stable core, but also the diversity of performances may go back to multiple performances by Jesus or multiple witnesses in the beginning (2003b, 532–34, 640–42, 660).<sup>25</sup>

For Dunn there seems to be no difference between the perception and understanding of Jesus during his ministry and the perception and understanding of him from the perspective of the Easter faith. Of course we need to remember that, for Dunn, the historical Jesus is redefined as the remembered Jesus. The question is, does the Easter faith initiate a transformation of the memory of Jesus? I believe it does, and I believe the Fourth Evangelist signals that he is aware that it does. While Dunn is willing to call on John's Gospel as a source, it is "mostly as a secondary source to supplement or corroborate the testimony of the Synoptic tradition" (2003b, 167). John establishes a pattern of mission in which Jesus moves regularly between Galilee and the major festivals in Jerusalem. But Dunn accepts the view he finds in the Synoptics, that Jesus made his mission base (home) in Capernaum, from which his mission radiated out in journeys of one or two days at a time (2003b, 317–19, 321–23, 519–20, 559, 593–94, 885).<sup>26</sup>

Dunn's cautious use of the Johannine tradition, using it only for confirmation, suggests that he too recognizes the transforming power of the resurrection faith on the reflection of the Evangelist found there. The remembered Jesus needs more careful definition before identifying it with the historical Jesus. Memory of him might be very tenuously related to the historical figure of Jesus, if we mean Jesus as he was perceived before his death. Even for those who knew Jesus, events subsequent to his historical life might transform their understanding of him. The risk of this might be far greater for those whose memory was secondhand or for

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25. In developing his views of oral transmission, Dunn (2003b, 205–10) has drawn heavily on the work of Kenneth Bailey.

26. For a critique of this aspect of Dunn's thesis, see my 2005, 317–22.

second-generation believers. For such reasons Bultmann sought to work with the earliest layer of the Synoptic tradition. What becomes characteristic might be influenced by the new perception of Jesus and extraneous factors such as life outside "Palestine" and the influence of Gentile believers, to name the obvious.

My intention is to show that John emphasizes the transformation of memory in a way that sets this Gospel apart from the Synoptics. Again, *all* Gospels are written from the perspective of the resurrection and have produced accounts that are theologically interpretative. Only John shows *awareness* of doing this, and the evidence confirms that the extent and depth of this transformation is significantly greater in John than in the other Gospels. One aspect of this evidence is found in the uniform style of the Gospel in which Jesus, the narrator, and the lead witness John (the Baptist) share the same language and viewpoint. A second is the way the Evangelist explicitly draws attention to the level of the disciples' understanding during Jesus' ministry, contrasting this with the postresurrection, postglorification perspective, which transforms memory. This is not a regular feature in the Gospel, incident by incident. It is done twice: in the opening public action of Jesus in the temple incident; and at the end of Jesus' public ministry in the incident of his very public arrival in Jerusalem on his final fateful visit.<sup>27</sup> The placing of these two incidents is structurally critical, implying that the framed story of Jesus has been given a second-level interpretation. This is made clear by the narrator, who contrasts the memory (or ignorance) of the disciples at the time with their postresurrection/glorification memory. Here the narrator addresses the reader directly. From the beginning the readers enjoy an inspired postresurrection perspective. While this may have happened to some extent in the Synoptics, these two framing accounts signal that John knew what he was doing. Then we should notice that John speaks of this transformation of knowledge as the transformation of memory (2:17, 22) and as a transformation from ignorance to comprehending memory (12:16).

**John 2:17, 22.** John has as much reason for locating the temple incident at the beginning as Mark has for placing it at the end of Jesus' ministry. I am unpersuaded that John's placing of the temple incident has greater claim to historicity than Mark's (*pace* Moloney 2000a). If the Johannine order does anything, it shakes our confidence in the reconstruction based on the Synoptics without providing grounds for confidence in any other. John transforms the *narrative* of the temple incident into a *pretext* allowing Jesus to speak of the sign of his resurrection as the authentication of his authority (2:18–21). But this perspective, which now dominates the Johannine account, came about after the resurrection (2:21–22). The narrator makes this clear by describing the transformation of the memory of the disciples, contrasting what they remembered on the day of the event (2:17) with

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27. The first Cana sign involves a covert action of Jesus in which the Fourth Evangelist notes the consequences only for the already gathered group of disciples (2:11).

what they remembered when Jesus was risen (2:22). In this incident the disciples are mentioned only in these verses, in their act of remembering, just as they are mentioned only at the end of the first sign at Cana, in the act of believing (2:11). In neither event do the disciples have any active role in the incident itself. Their role is to respond, and in 2:11 their response is described in fully adequate terms. But in 2:17, 22, it is clear that the response becomes adequate only in the second stage, after the resurrection. This is made especially clear by dealing with the two stages of memory.

Each stage is introduced by ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ("his disciples remembered..."). The first memory arose from Jesus' action interpreted by his word, "Do not make my father's *house* into a *house* of trade" (market house; 2:16), when "his disciples remembered that it is written, 'Zeal for your house consumes me'" (2:17). This is a far cry from the postresurrection memory, which is made clear by the narrator's explanation of Jesus' response to the demand of the Jews for a sign. Jesus began his response with the words, "You destroy this temple." Clearly the Jews thought he was talking about the Jerusalem temple (2:20), as it seems the disciples also did at the time. But the narrator explains that Jesus spoke of the temple of his body. Thus, in the words that follow, Jesus offers his resurrection as the authenticating sign of his authority, which the Jews demanded from him (2:18). But they will have to wait for it! Only after Jesus had risen from the dead did his disciples remember that he had said this, understanding the words in a new way. What they remembered was in reality the dawning of new knowledge expressed in old, already-known words. Then they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus spoke. Here John makes the resurrection of Jesus structurally crucial for the transformation of memory and coming to the fullness of faith. In this process the word of Jesus and the word of Scripture become mutually illuminating.

**John 12:16.** If the transformation of memory is clear in the temple incident, John later portrays a transition from ignorance, from the failure to understand, to a remembering that explicitly involves a new level of understanding. The narrative of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem involves not two levels of memory but the transition from ignorance to an illuminated, new-understanding memory. This difference from 2:17, 22 suggests that there is a degree of validity in the initial memory of 2:17 as well as the postresurrection memory. The latter grows out of the former. But 12:16 contrasts total incomprehension with comprehending memory. Mention of "his disciples" appears with reference to their failure to understand (ταῦτα οὐκ ἔγνωσαν αὐτοῦ οἱ μαθηταί). That is, "at first," but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things (τότε ἐμνήσθησαν ὅτι ταῦτα) were written of him and they did these things (ταῦτα) to him. When the two parts of the statement are kept in mind, John here implies the same formula that we find in the mention of *his disciples remembering* in 2:17, 22 (ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ). This formulaic introduction confirms the framing effect of the two narratives. As in 2:22, the new consciousness in 12:16 comes later, here when Jesus was glorified. The relationship between *resurrection*, *glorification*, and

*exaltation* is complex. There is a degree of semantic overlap in John's use of these terms. In 2:22 and 12:16 the new memory involves an aspect of the event (Jesus' word or actions done to him) and a scriptural illumination of it. That memory was made possible by the new perspective of resurrection or glorification. Perspective, event, and Scripture are mutually illuminating.

These narratives, one at the beginning and the other at the end of John's account of Jesus' public ministry, are paradigmatic, signaling the perspective from which this Gospel has been written—self-consciously written. But, according to John, it is not only perspective that has transformed the memory of Jesus written down in this Gospel.

**John 14:26.** John's account of Jesus' last night with his disciples differs as much as any part of the Gospel from the Synoptic accounts, which have no parallel to the footwashing, the final discourse(s), or the great prayer of John 17. The final discourse(s) poses many difficult questions that are outside the scope of this essay.<sup>28</sup> It addresses the many difficulties to be faced by the disciples at the departure of Jesus, including their grief at his absence and their need of his teaching in new and difficult situations. John introduces Jesus' teaching about the coming of the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit (14:16–17, 26) as Jesus' response to these difficulties. The giving of the Paraclete/Spirit of Truth was to overcome the orphaning of the disciples at Jesus' departure (14:16–18) and to supply their need of the teaching of Jesus (14:26), enabling that teaching to continue. Jesus says, "He will teach you all things and he will *remind* [ὑπομνήσει] you of all that I said to you" (14:26). Here the activity of the Spirit deals with reflective recall, *memory* of what Jesus had taught. The teaching of the past Jesus continues to be made present. If 2:22 and 12:16 affirm the resurrection/glorification memory of the disciples, 14:26 asserts that it is the Spirit of Truth who stimulates the memory, which is thus an inspired memory.

Later in the discourse (16:7) Jesus indicates that his departure is a precondition of the coming of the Paraclete. Jesus' *departure* is part of the complex of the *resurrection-glorification-exaltation* motifs. While 14:26 speaks of *teaching* and *reminding*, the nature of that teaching and reminding is now shown to involve what is new (16:12–15). Jesus tells the disciples he has much to say to them but that they are presently unable to cope with what he has to say. When the Spirit of Truth comes, *he will lead them* into all truth. This truth is not bound to the past because the Spirit "will announce to you the things to come" (τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν). The new situation to which Jesus refers has two aspects. It is the other side of his death and resurrection. That brings a new light on everything. It also involves the coming of the Spirit of Truth. The role of the Spirit is bound

28. For a response to some of these, see Painter 1981, also in Painter 1993 as "The Farewell of the Messiah."

to Jesus, but it brings his teaching into the present and the future. This is a transformed knowledge, a memory that has been made new.

James D. G. Dunn stresses the continuity of the memory of Jesus in the tradition embodied in the Gospels. If memory is memory, there must be strong continuity. But a person's memory of another person, or an event, can change in the light of later experiences. It seems to me that John goes to great lengths to make clear how certain events have transformed the memory of Jesus now embodied in this Gospel. John has written with the intent that this transformation should be carried through in a thoroughgoing fashion. We might say that, for John, this is the real Jesus revealed through resurrection, glorification, and departure and through the inspiring presence of the Spirit of Truth. But for John, certain elements concerning the historical Jesus, the Jesus of the past, remain essential to his memory, even though the inspired memory of the risen Lord has transformed his understanding. This transformation makes the identification of good historical tradition in John difficult, as James Dunn has recognized in his *Jesus Remembered*. In the quest of the historical Jesus, the remembered Jesus may not pass the test. Memory may stray wildly from the subject it remembers, or it may develop understanding way beyond the scope of the remembered subject. For this reason other criteria are needed in the historical task. Based on the recognition of how the power of the resurrection and the experience of the Spirit have transformed the Johannine story, we may doubt that significant use will be made of it in historical Jesus research. To express the dilemma in old terms, there is continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, but there are also significant differences. In John the differences are so pervasive that the identification of good *independent* historical tradition remains problematic. From the perspective of the resurrection faith, what John has done may be legitimate and even necessary, but the rigorous quest for the historical Jesus remains crucial to ensure that the memory of faith does not run wild and lose its roots in historical reality.





## PART 4:

### WAYS FORWARD: A CASE STUDY

So, given new lenses for glimpsing better the issues related to John, Jesus, and history, how might one proceed in doing a direct analysis of any or all of these subjects? While no single approach can be definitive, perhaps a case study will help in providing at least one example of a way forward. In her treatment of Jesus' visits to Jerusalem, Paula Fredriksen offers such an analysis. As Smith, Van Belle, and others point out, Professor Fredriksen is one of the leading Jesus scholars in recent years to use materials from the Synoptic traditions and from John's Gospel in an effort to reconstruct the Jesus of history. Fredriksen begins by focusing on the historical dilemma that had driven her recent book on the historical Jesus, *Jesus of Nazareth; King of the Jews* (1999): Why was Jesus crucified, but his followers were not (2007)? Dissenting from the new scholarly orthodoxy established by E. P. Sanders's foundational study, *Jesus and Judaism* (1985), she questions whether the so-called "cleansing of the temple" can account for Jesus' arrest and execution—even questioning whether such an event as portrayed happened at all. If we look strictly at narrative chronology, she points out, we have not a three-to-one split, the Synoptics against John, but a one-to-one choice: Mark's chronology or John's. If not John's chronology itself, a "John-like" chronology of multiple trips to Jerusalem, and of regular teaching from the temple precincts, speaks much more clearly to the famous dilemma, she urges. Surprisingly, thinking with John, the most theologically developed Gospel, holds out against Mark's very theological passion finale the way to constructing a historically plausible explanation for Jesus' execution.

Mark Allan Powell was invited to respond to Fredriksen's paper, and as a fitting representative of the current state of Synoptic-based historical Jesus scholarship he takes issue with her inferences and her bases for making them. In addition to John, Powell has given considerable thought to the state of Synoptic studies (1997), and he represents the tendency to follow Sanders in particular (Sanders 1985; 1993) in seeing the temple incident as a direct precipitator of movements to put Jesus to death. Then again, both Fredriksen and Powell are aware of the fact that even Mark appears to include references to Jesus teaching in the temple "day after day" before (Mark 14:49), as well as false witnesses attesting to Jesus' prediction of the demise and rebuilding of the temple in three

days (Mark 14:58; narrated elsewhere *only* in John 2), so it is not only John that counters the Markan itinerary; Mark appears to as well, in ways that cohere with John. Of course, some of these questions are answered by how we conceive a first-century Jewish northern prophet to have behaved in Jerusalem. Did the Jesus of history seek to overturn Jewish religious systems in the name of God or simply to reform them? Whatever answer we come up with, the history-theology question is inescapable, both with reference to Synoptic *and* Johannine quests for Jesus.

As we grind those new lenses, however, we must always beware ... lest we also see our own reflections in the lenses themselves!

# THE HISTORICAL JESUS, THE SCENE IN THE TEMPLE, AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

*Paula Fredriksen*

## 1. THE SYNOPTICS AND JOHN

The Gospel of John entered ecclesiastical tradition under something of a cloud, and despite the wildly shifting winds of learned hermeneutics, the cloud seems to have stayed. John's place in the canon, its tenor and content in comparison to the Synoptics, its value as evidence in recent and current academic efforts to reconstruct the life and mission of Jesus of Nazareth—at every turn, the Fourth Gospel's status as any sort of historical witness seems at least questionable, if not actually compromised.

John first attained historical visibility as the Gospel of choice for Valentinian Christians; they, in turn, attained notoriety through the efforts of Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus worked hard to refute and to condemn the theology, exegesis, and ritual practices of these “spiritual Christians” with their “falsely so-called gnosis.” To Irenaeus's dismay, their sensibility and praxis drew intimately on their close reading of John. Other second-century Christians, such as Marcion or Tatian, chose to grant authority to only one Gospel. Irenaeus, however, like his Valentinian counterparts, preferred more. But unlike the Valentinians, Irenaeus drew the line at four Gospels—no more, no fewer. In his view, he did so for rational and theological reasons:

The Gospels could not possibly be either more or less in number than they are. Since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, the church ... fittingly has four pillars, breathing out incorruption and revivifying men. From this it is clear that the Logos, the artificer of all things, he who sits upon the cherubim and sustains all things ... gave us the gospel in four-

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\* With grace, good humor, and astringent clarity, John Ashton read and commented on an earlier draft of this essay. The final version would doubtless have been better had I followed more of his suggestions. Herewith my appreciation and thanks.

fold form, but held together by one spirit.... For the cherubim have four faces, ... [and] the Gospels, in which Christ is enthroned, are like these. (*Haer.* 11.8)

The conclusion is unavoidable: one reason that we as historians find ourselves struggling with this particular Gospel is because it was so popular with the “wrong people” some eighteen centuries ago. Irenaeus, exegetically co-opting this Gospel for his church, secured its place in a collection that more than a hundred and thirty years later was recognized as authoritative and endorsed by the Emperor Constantine. This is hardly a resounding reason for staking any claim to John’s value as an historical source for events nearly two centuries prior to Irenaeus’s struggles. Exegetical battles between educated intellectuals in the second and third centuries over how to read the Septuagint, not historical efforts to preserve a record of events in the first generation of what would become the Christian movement, ultimately stand behind the formation of the sanctioned fourth-century anthology we call the New Testament. Canonicity, in short, says nothing for historicity.

Once brought into comparison with the Synoptic Gospels, John’s status as an historical source seems uncertain for other well-known reasons. Two prime considerations are the chronology of his Gospel and the character and self-presentation of his protagonist.

The problem with John’s chronology relative to that of the Synoptics is chiefly that it is different. Its place within the canon creates the illusion of a three-to-one split. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all present Jesus as moving along a one-way itinerary from his encounter with the Baptist through his mission in and around the Galilee and, finally, to his death in Jerusalem at Passover: the implied period is about one year. John’s Jesus moves more like a metronome—up and down, back and forth—from Jerusalem, to the Galilee, through Samaria, and back to Judea. Because John accounts for Jesus’ travels by invoking pilgrimage holidays, it is often said that John’s Jesus travels frequently to Jerusalem—and, again depending on the temporal scaffolding provided by these holidays, for a period of over two years. But in fact, most of Jesus’ major speeches and the Evangelist’s dramatic didactic scenes occur near or in the city, often in the precincts of the temple. The Fourth Gospel hardly presents a Galilean mission at all.

Two details highlight this chronological difference: John’s placement of the “cleansing of the temple,” and his depiction of Jesus’ final interview with the high priest. In the Synoptics, the temple scene marks the beginning of the end. A narrative high point, the action both punctuates the energetic sweep into Jerusalem announced by the triumphal entry and triggers the Synoptics Gospels’ climax by bringing Jesus to the hostile attention of Jerusalem’s chief priests, who thereafter plot to destroy him. John, however, disconnects the triumphal entry from Jesus’ disruption in the temple, which he places in his second chapter, right at the beginning of Jesus’ mission. Dramatically, it goes nowhere—no priestly plots, no endangerment to the hero, no thickening hostility—at least, not until his next visit three chapters later. And while the Synoptics pair Jesus’ “trial” before Pilate

with equally dramatic trials before a congested Jewish high court—with the additional drama in Matthew and Mark of a pronouncement of Jesus' blasphemy by the high priest—the correlating event in John is brief, spare, and (unusual for him) austere nontheological.

Nothing in John's chronology is intrinsically improbable. Many scholars have even noted its superiority on several points to that of the Synoptics, notably, on the duration of Jesus' mission and on the presentation of his final encounter with Annas and Caiaphas. Of course, the impression that consensus evangelical chronology stands against John is chimerical, since Matthew and Luke both rely on Mark for the linear organization of their respective narratives. On the specific issue of chronology, what we have is not a three-one split but an even choice: Mark's or John's.

The general lack of confidence in John's historicity, which also affects the use that scholars are prepared to make of his chronology, stems primarily from the way that John suffers in comparison to its canonical companions on the issue of the characterization of Jesus. To put this point differently: Synoptic chronology enjoys a borrowed respectability because of the substantially greater historical plausibility of the Synoptic Jesus. A recognizably first-century Jewish figure can be sketched from the material available in Mark and Q, one that coheres with material in Paul's letters<sup>1</sup> and in Josephus's histories, and one that can be matched to later Aramaic Jewish traditions.<sup>2</sup> The protagonist of the Fourth Gospel, by contrast, is first of all a mouthpiece for the Evangelist's peculiar Christology. John's Jesus is always and everywhere the Johannine Christ, tirelessly expatiating on his own unique and very high theological status, often in terms idiosyncratic to the Gospel itself. If Jesus of Nazareth, during his lifetime, really did have anything like a popular Jewish following (as the simple fact of his execution implies), he cannot have been making speeches like this to them. *Nolo contendere*. On the characterization of the figure of Jesus, Synoptic superiority is clear.

What, then, of the use to which historical Jesus scholars have put the Fourth Gospel? Here the Synoptics dominate reconstructions.<sup>3</sup> For some scholars, this is a matter of principle. Geza Vermes, whose work has focused particularly on the coherence of certain evangelical phrases, traditions, and titles with material in later Aramaic Jewish sources, sees John's Gospel as both symptomatic of and contributory to "the de-Judaization of the pristine gospel in the Graeco-Roman

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1. Especially on the issues of eschatology, ethics, and *paradoxa*, see Fredriksen 1999, 74–116.

2. Exploration of these traditions has been the prime contribution of Geza Vermes (1993; 2001), thanks to whom cameo appearances of other charismatic Galilean holy men—Honi the Circle-Drawer, Hanina ben Dosa, Hanan the Rainmaker—now routinely people works on the historical Jesus.

3. Noted and objected to by Charles Hedrick 1988. See further Marianne Meyers Thompson 1996.

world.” John’s Jesus only obscures the Jesus of history; his theologically freighted Gospel only confuses the historian’s enterprise. Vermes, in brief, sees no place for John in any serious reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> Other Jesus scholars, whether their Jesus is an apocalyptic prophet (E. P. Sanders), a social radical variously conceived (Crossan, Borg), or a Christian theologian *avant la lettre* (Wright), refuse to engage John to the degree that their Jesus adheres to Mark’s chronology—at John’s expense.<sup>5</sup>

The question of John’s historical usefulness turns in part upon the vexed issue of its literary relationship to the other three Gospels. This question is usually framed in terms of Mark: Did John depend on Mark? If so, why did he change what he changed? Is he independent of Mark? If so, this enhances the claim of historicity for some of his material, which then shifts from being a factor of redactional decisions relevant only to reconstructing the Evangelist’s intentions, to traditions that may count as evidence toward reconstructing the life and times of Jesus.

I do not propose to solve the question of the literary relations between the four Gospels here. D. Moody Smith, in his second edition of *John among the Gospels* (2001) spends approximately 240 pages surveying the various scholarly positions taken on this issue since 1904.<sup>6</sup> Innumerable combinations of theories of literary dependence and of evangelical motivations have been proposed and defended, with conviction and ingenuity, by generations of scholars, including some of the greatest names of modern New Testament scholarship. Yet these the-

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4. Vermes 1993, 213. Vermes includes Paul in the same indictment; I will say more below on using Paul as well as John for reconstructing the historical Jesus. See further Vermes 2001, 6–54, for his more recent observations on the Gospel.

5. Sanders’s focus on Jesus’ action in the temple as the trip-switch to the Passion requires the chronology in Mark, although he notes the superior plausibility of John’s description of events around the Jewish hearing before the high priest (1985, ch. 1 and *passim* on the significance of Jesus’ action in the temple court; 317–18 on John’s account of the Jewish “trial”). Q, or some redactional layer imputed to Q, serves the Jesus Seminar as the Gospel of choice for reconstructing Jesus; John, again, stands at too many removes to be useful. John Dominic Crossan, a post-Jesus Seminar scholar, identifies and organizes his primary sources elaborately and creatively (see esp. Crossan 1991). Notwithstanding the originality of some of his evidential choices (such as reliance on Gospels such as Thomas, Peter, and a redactional creation of his own, the Cross Gospel), however, Crossan orders the chronology of his Jesus’ mission according to the Gospel of Mark. N. T. Wright, who renounces both the Jesus Seminar and all its works, likewise draws only lightly on John and says so forthrightly. He notes that the shape of current historical Jesus scholarship in part compels his selection: “The debate [on the historical Jesus] to which I wish to contribute in this book has been conducted almost entirely in terms of the synoptic tradition” (1996, xvi).

6. The surest way to make students in Gospel seminars anxious is to have them read both Barrett’s and Brown’s commentaries and then ask them to write a short paper on the question of dependence. I can scarcely follow Boismard’s chart of Gospel origins (reproduced in D. Moody Smith 2001, 143), although it does remind me of expressionist works by Jackson Pollock.

ories frequently conflict. Consensus seems elusive or ephemeral, and, given the nature of the evidence, any firm conclusion seems impossible.

Still, what do I *think*? I think that John is largely independent of Synoptic tradition. I also think that at some point through some means a redactor of John's text became acquainted with some of the traditions known to the other Evangelists as well. I also think that I have little hope of getting much clearer on this question.<sup>7</sup>

But something I know, not just something I think, is that John's independence or lack thereof does not much matter for the argument that I am about to make, namely, that John provides us with some critical purchase on what has become a new orthodoxy in historical Jesus research. I will also argue that John, alone of our canonical choices, provides us with the *sort* of picture that can point us toward a historically plausible reconstruction of the shape of Jesus' mission, of the circumstances around his death, and of the growth and spread of the earliest movement in the years following his crucifixion. To make these points, however, I must begin at the end.

## 2. THE DEATH OF JESUS AND THE SCENE IN THE TEMPLE

The single most solid fact we have about Jesus' life is his death: Jesus was crucified. Thus Paul, the Gospels, Josephus, Tacitus—the evidence does not get any better than this.<sup>8</sup> This fact implies several others. If Jesus died on a cross, he died by Rome's hand and within a context where Rome was concerned about sedition. But against this fact of Jesus' crucifixion stands another equally incontestable fact: although Jesus was executed as a rebel, none of his immediate followers was. We know from Paul's letters that they survived: he lists them as witnesses to the resurrection (1 Cor 15:3–5), and he describes his later dealings with some of them (Gal 1–2). Stories in the Gospels and in Acts confirm this information from Paul.

The good news is that we have two firm facts. The bad news is that they pull in different directions, with maximum torque concentrated precisely at Jesus' solo crucifixion. Like any empire, Rome was famously intolerant of sedition. Josephus provides extensive accounts of other popular Jewish charismatic figures on either side of Jesus' lifetime: they were cut down, together with their followers.<sup>9</sup>

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7. I note with deepest appreciation John Meier's calm review of these issues and the simplicity and clarity of his conclusions (another way of saying that I agree with him) in 1991, 41–55.

8. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.3.3 (64); Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44. See discussion with copious bibliography in Meier 1991, 56–92.

9. John the Baptizer's death does not conform to this pattern. Antipas arrested him, imprisoned him, and executed him—all fairly orderly. See Meier's shrewd remarks at 2001, 625. One difference between the Baptizer and these other charismatic figures may be that he does not seem to have amassed a standing group of followers. People came and went to him but did not

If Pilate had seriously thought that Jesus were politically dangerous *in the way that crucifixion implies*, more than Jesus alone would have died,<sup>10</sup> and certainly the community of his followers would not have been able to set up in Jerusalem, evidently unmolested by Rome for the six years or so that Pilate remained in office. The implication that Jesus died *alone* is that Pilate did not think that he was politically dangerous.

If Pilate knew that Jesus was not dangerous, we still have two questions: Why was Jesus killed? And why, specifically, by crucifixion? At this juncture most historians, like the Gospel narratives that we all ultimately rely on, turn for explanation to the chief priests. For whatever reason (different reconstructions offer different motivations), the priests decided that Jesus had to go. Both the Synoptic tradition and John, although very differently, posit priestly initiative behind Jesus' arrest. Secondary support for this reconstruction comes from 1 Thess 2:14–15<sup>11</sup> and from Josephus.<sup>12</sup> Ancillary considerations also support this conjecture, a prime one being that Caiaphas held the office of high priest from 18 to 36 C.E. Presumably he had excellent working relations with whichever prefect was in power.<sup>13</sup> If he wanted a favor—such as getting Jesus out of the way—Pilate might have been happy to oblige. Priestly hostility to Jesus also obliquely solves the puzzle of why only Jesus. The priests typically were concerned to minimize bloodshed. Jesus alone is the target of their animosity or concern, so Jesus alone, they tell Pilate, need die. Pilate obliges the priests.

Whence their mortal enmity? On this point, despite surpassingly different, indeed incommensurate, portraits of Jesus, his mission, and his message, scholars agree: Jesus' action in the temple court before Passover moved him into the cross-hairs of Jerusalem's priests and sealed his fate.<sup>14</sup> At this point, the quest for the

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linger; other charismatics traveling *en masse* with large groups of followers drew the immediate and hostile attention of the authorities, on which see Sanders 1993; also Fredriksen 1999, 190–91, 244; and below, n. 19, on Meier's analogizing of Jesus' death to John's.

10. I have no reason to question that men other than Jesus were executed at the same time that he was (e.g., the two *ληστάι* of Mark 15:27 and par.). But these men were not part of Jesus' circle: that is the point.

11. If the *Ioudaioi* who "killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets" are (1) the priests and (2) not a post-Pauline interpolation. I do not like theories of interpolation but have yet to find a compelling response to the points raised by Pearson 1971.

12. *A.J.* 18.3.3 (63–64). Josephus is vague, saying only that "leading men" (*protoi*) bring an accusation (of what? not clear), with the result that Pilate condemned Jesus to the cross. See Meier 1991, 63; Fredriksen 1999, 248–49.

13. "The two leaders, civil [Pilate] and religious [Caiaphas], survived for so long in what were often revolving-door appointments apparently because they worked well together" (Meier 2001, 623).

14. The preference for Mark's chronology over John's, and especially the explanatory importance of Jesus' action in the temple for his subsequent arrest and execution, provides so far as I know the unique point on which Sanders, Borg, Crossan, Vermes, and Wright all agree.



historical Jesus segues into the quest for the historical action in the temple. What did Jesus do there, and what did he mean by it?

Known in church tradition as the “cleansing of the temple,” Jesus’ disruption in the temple court was long seen as his protest against commerce in the temple precincts. When scholars held this view, they took their cue from the Evangelists themselves, who (albeit with variations) presented Jesus as protesting against such activity.

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he over-turned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he taught, and said to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mark 11:15–18 rsv)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” (John 2:13–16 rsv)

It was Sanders in *Jesus and Judaism* (1985, 61–90) who did the most to dissolve this earlier reading, by pointing out that it made no historical sense. The function of the Jerusalem temple—as indeed, of any ancient temple—was to serve as a place to offer sacrifices. Money changing and the provision of suitable offerings were part of the support services offered at the temple to accommodate pilgrims. Did Jesus then mean to repudiate temple sacrifice itself? That would have made him virtually unique among his contemporaries, whether Jewish or pagan, since worship in antiquity involved offerings. It also would have been tantamount to rejecting the better part of the five books of Torah, wherein God had revealed the protocols and purposes of these sacrifices to Israel. If Jesus targeted not the sacrifices but the support services facilitating them, his gesture would have lacked practical significance. If he were targeting not the support services but some sort of priestly malfeasance that might have stood behind them, no trace of this protest remains either in the Gospels (nothing of the sort figures in the accusations against Jesus brought at his “trials”) or in later Christian tradition (Paul, for instance, says nothing of the sort). Finally, on either reconstruction,

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It looks like Meier, in the forthcoming final volume of his study, will join them. Meier 2001, 501, endorses John’s itinerary over Mark’s but will hold to this construction of Jesus’ action in the temple as a prediction of destruction that will lead to his death.

Jesus would have failed utterly to communicate his message to his earliest followers, who after his death evidently continued to live in Jerusalem, to worship at the temple, and to revere the temple and its cult as a unique privilege granted by God to Israel.<sup>15</sup>

Sanders's analysis moved academic discussion from what Jesus (supposedly) said to what he did, namely, overturning the moneychangers' tables. The earlier interpretation of this scene as a "cleansing" saw Jesus' action through the lens of the—admittedly redactional—lines attributed to him in Mark and in John. Sanders separated the two, focused on the action of overturning tables, and reinterpreted that action as a symbol of destruction. To make his case, he presented an interpretive context of other predictions of the temple's destruction and/or restoration culled from the Gospels, from other early Christian writings, and from other early Jewish texts composed in the period to either side of Jesus' lifetime. Sanders then argued that Jesus' reported gesture, not the Evangelists' various redactional activity around Jesus' speech, revealed Jesus' actual meaning. By overturning the tables, said Sanders, Jesus symbolically proclaimed the temple's impending destruction, to be succeeded by its rebuilding and the establishment of God's kingdom. The content of Jesus' prophecy cohered with and reaffirmed the message of his mission: the kingdom was at hand.

Other Jesuses followed suit. Jesus the existential Galilean *hasid* (Vermes), Jesus the wandering Jewish cynic peasant sage (Crossan), Jesus the antipurity activist (Borg), Jesus the angry critic of separatist, exclusivist, racist, nationalist Judaism (Wright)—all enacted a prophecy of the temple's impending destruction. The meaning attached to that destruction varied according to the message of the particular Jesus envisioned.<sup>16</sup> That the historical Jesus did enact this scene in

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15. On the absence of criticisms about the way the priests ran the temple in early Christian tradition, see Sanders 1993, 255–56. Both Paul and Luke confirm the earliest community's residence in Jerusalem: Gal 1:17–2:1; Luke 24:52; Acts 1:12 and *passim*. Worshiping in the temple is in Luke 24:53; Acts 3:1; 5:12, 42; 21:26–30 (by Paul); 22:17 (again). Acts 9:32 mentions the Jesus movement in Lydda within a few years of the crucifixion; Josephus, in *B.J.* 2.515, states that, at the beginning of the war, Lydda fell to the Romans because the entire town had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate Sukkot: these "Christian" Jews exhibited traditional temple piety. Specifically on sacrificing, see Matt 5:23–24. On the temple as God's earthly dwelling place, see Matt 23:21; Rom 9:4 (in Paul's "Jewish" Greek, *δοξα* rests on the Hebrew *כבוד*); specifically on cult, *λατρεία*/עבודה in Rom 9:4. On Paul's entirely normative positive appreciation of the temple and its cult generally, see Fredriksen 2000a, 62–68; on that of Jesus and the early movement, see Meier 2001, 498–502.

16. Sanders's fundamental insight about the traditional interpretation as "cleansing" was that it made no historical sense. His argument was so compelling that it served as the fulcrum by means of which he levered analysis onto a discussion of Jesus' action rather than his sayings. The subsequent use to which other scholars have put Sanders's insight, and the meaning they have given to Jesus' action as a prophetic enactment of impending destruction, alas, has let the old "cleansing" argument in the back door: see Fredriksen 1995b, 81–91, 94–97; 1995a.

the temple, and that he thereby prophesied the temple's destruction, is in current scholarship virtually boilerplate. So too, in scholarly opinion, is the fundamental consequence of Jesus' action: he thereby alarmed and alienated the priests, who saw his prophecy as a threat. Their alienation in turn explains why Jesus died. The priests signaled Pilate, and Pilate (for whatever reason) complied.<sup>17</sup>

This new historiographical paradigm has at least two consequences relevant to our topic. First, by establishing a line that runs straight from the action in the temple courts to Jesus' death on the cross, it recapitulates the defining elements of Mark's passion narrative. Second, in consequence of this dependence on Mark, scholars are preoccupied with an issue that Mark itself dramatically highlighted in its depiction of the Sanhedrin "trial": Jesus' identity. As with Mark, so with scholarly reconstructions: Who or what Jesus thought he was essentially explains why he died.<sup>18</sup>

This reconstruction, in any of its variations, answers the first question: Why did Jesus die? But all fail to answer, or even to address, the more specific question: Why did he die by crucifixion? We are so habituated to knowing that Jesus was crucified that we fail to notice how awkwardly that fact fits with what else we have. If Pilate were simply doing a favor for the priests, he could have disposed of Jesus easily and without fanfare, murdering him by simpler means.<sup>19</sup> I repeat:

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17. According to Sanders 1993, 265, the priests construe Jesus' action as a prophetic threat to the temple, and this "seals his fate"; more vaguely, Vermes 1993, x; Crossan, also vague (Jesus is "killed by religio-political agreement" between the priests and Pilate) 1994, 132–33; Wright (who holds close to the Evangelists' picture that Pilate's compliance was coerced) 1996, 493–611.

18. Putting the matter between Jesus and the priests in this way foregrounds a kind of principled religious disagreement between them. Indeed, the existence of such is presupposed by some scholars as necessary for any plausible reconstruction. "Jesus cannot be separated from his Jewish context," explains one quester, "but neither can he be collapsed into it so that he is left without a *sharp critique of his contemporaries*" (Wright 1996, 98, emphasis added). The existence of such a principled disagreement is one of John Meier's five criteria of historicity: "The *criterion of Jesus' rejection and execution* looks at the larger pattern of Jesus' ministry and asks what words and deeds fit in with and explain his trial and crucifixion. A Jesus whose words and deeds did not threaten or alienate people, especially powerful people, is not the historical Jesus" (1994, 6; same point, made slightly differently, 1991, 177; 2001, 11–12). The temple scene not only makes Jesus conspicuous, then; it hints at the reasons for Jesus' religious offensiveness to the priests. So too Meier 2001, 618: "A Jew from the Galilean countryside who presented himself in Jerusalem during the great feasts as a prophet *possessing charismatic authority over Law and temple* could be assured stiff opposition" (emphasis added). The continuing difficulty, of course, is that no amount of religious tension between Jesus and the priests can account for Pilate's decision to kill Jesus by crucifixion.

19. Wright 1996, 552, distinguishes between Pilate as the "sufficient cause" of Jesus' crucifixion and the priests, who were the "necessary cause." This construction misses the point: priestly initiative might account for Jesus' death, but not for his mode of death. Taking note of the pattern of killing the leader without molesting his followers, Meier correlates Jesus' death with that of John the Baptist: "Antipas had decided ... that an ounce of prevention by way of

Pilate's seriously thinking that Jesus posed a serious revolutionary threat—the simplest implication of crucifixion—is belied by Jesus' solo death. So too with the priests: if *for whatever reason* they had wanted Jesus dead, no public execution was necessary, and simpler means of achieving their end were readily available.

Further, Jesus' public death ill accords with the narrative contexts developed by Mark and John. They both insist that Jesus was so popular with the holiday crowd that he had to be arrested by stealth. What we know from Josephus further complicates the question: both priests and prefects (or procurators, later) always had a vested interest in avoiding noisy popular confrontations because, when trouble erupted, such episodes put them and their positions at risk.<sup>20</sup> A slow public execution of an extremely popular figure during a potentially turbulent holiday risked protest. For all these reasons, then, a surreptitious murder—prompted, perhaps, by the priests; effected, quite easily, by Pilate—makes sense. Instead, quite deliberately and despite (evidently) having Jesus arrested in secret,<sup>21</sup> Pilate chose to execute him slowly, flamboyantly, and in public. Yet he made no move, then or later, against any of Jesus' followers.

How does thinking with John help us to address these difficulties?

### 3. THE DEATH OF THE TEMPLE AND JESUS' PROPHECY

Scholarly consensus, which generally affirms Mark's chronology, holds several points: (1) Jesus predicted the temple's coming destruction; (2) he symbolically

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execution was worth a pound of cure by way of military action. A single execution—we hear nothing of subsequent persecution, let alone execution, of John's disciples—forestalled a possible uprising at a later date. At a certain point, after increasing tensions each time Jesus visited Jerusalem during the feasts, and especially after Jesus staged provocative, prophetic acts by his entry into Jerusalem and by his 'cleansing' of the temple just before the Passover of A.D. 30, Caiaphas and Pilate adopted the 'Antipas solution': cut off the head of the movement with one swift, preemptive blow" (2001, 625). This description is *almost* right. But the analogue to John's execution in prison would have been a similarly off-stage execution of Jesus. Instead, if modes of executions can be said to have opposites, Pilate did just the opposite. Explaining that choice is the problem, and it is also the point at which analogies to the Baptizer break down.

20. On patterns of accountability, see Josephus, *B.J.* 1.652–655; *A.J.* 17.149–167, on the incident around Herod's golden eagle on one of the temple's gates; *A.J.* 18.85–89, Vitellius the Syrian legate sent Pilate to Rome, relieved Caiaphas of office, and appointed new priests after the bloodshed in Samaria; *B.J.* 2.232–244, after another incident in Samaria in 50 C.E., the Syrian legate orders the high priest, the chief priests, and other high-ranking citizens of Jerusalem to Rome, although none had been personally involved in the violence; *B.J.* 2.320–325, the priests attempt to turn the crowd in Jerusalem from violent protest. For a brief and lucid review of this political terrain, see Sanders 1993, 15–32; on the high priest in particular as the man in the middle, 266–67; Fredriksen 1999, 252–54.

21. A mote of support: Paul's use of παραδίδωμι in 1 Cor 11:23 ("handed over"? "betrayed"?) can be read as suggesting a surreptitious arrest.

enacted this prediction by overturning the tables in the temple court; (3) the priests, construing this prediction as a threat against the temple, moved to arrest and execute Jesus; and (4) they necessarily involved Pilate, who ordered Jesus crucified. Let us untangle these various threads.

**Did Jesus predict the Temple's destruction?** John Meier, famously meticulous, states that Mark 11:15–17 and John 2:13–17 “*narrate [his emphasis] versions of the so-called cleansing ... which most likely is a symbolic, prophetic action by which Jesus foretells and, in a sense, unleashes the imminent end of the present temple.*”<sup>22</sup> Pointing to sayings material in Mark, Q, L, and John wherein Jesus prophesies the end of the present temple, Meier invokes both multiple attestation and coherence. These multiply attested pronouncements about the temple's destruction, he suggests, establish the historicity of the prediction. Invoking coherence, he then argues that they cast light on the temple scene: “the sayings about the temple explain the otherwise puzzling prophetic action of Jesus in the temple.” In short, he concludes, Jesus really did predict the temple's destruction, and he specifically enacted his prediction by overturning the tables in the temple court.

Independent attestation is an essential tool in evaluating historicity. Meier adduces these verses (RSV):

- (1) Mark 13:2: “Do you see these great buildings? *There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*”
- (2) Mark 14:58: “We [Mark designates them as false witnesses] heard him say, ‘*I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.*’”
- (3) Q (Matt 23:38 // Luke 13:34): “Behold, *your [i.e., Jerusalem's] house is forsaken [and desolate].*”
- (4) Luke 19:41–44: “And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and *they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.*’”
- (5) John 2:19: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*”

To these verses we might add several others:

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22. Meier 2001, 501, emphasis added. Fundamental to both Meier's discussion and my own is Sanders 1985.

- (6) the derision of passers-by at the crucifixion in Mark 15:29–30: “Aha! *You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!*”
- (7) the accusation against Stephen brought by “false witnesses” in Acts 6:13–14a: “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place [the temple] and the law; for we have heard him say that *Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place.*”
- (8) the concern evinced by the chief priests and Pharisees gathered at their council in John 11:48: “If we let him go on thus [i.e., performing spectacular signs so that many believe in him, 11:45–47], everyone will believe in him, and *the Romans will come and destroy both our place [the temple] and our nation.*”

Undeniably, all these taken together represent some sort of multiply attested tradition. We might note that those verses that name Jesus as the agent of destruction and that shape the prophecy like a threat specifically disavow the prediction (nos. 2, 6, 7: all testimony from “false witnesses”), whereas the straightforward predictions simply stand (nos. 1, 3, and 4, which encompasses the entire city, not only the temple).<sup>23</sup> John names different agents altogether: “the Jews” (no. 5, where “temple” really refers to Jesus’ body)<sup>24</sup> and the Romans (no. 8).

How do we assess the historicity of this tradition specifically with reference to Jesus? Multiple attestation by itself demonstrates not authenticity but antiquity: a given tradition predates its various manifestations in different witnesses, if those witnesses are independent. *What* is attested still needs to be critically assessed. Most scholars see traditions about Mary’s virginity at the time of Jesus’ conception, for example, attested independently in both M and L, as evidence for the ways in which early Christians had begun reading the Septuagint, not as evidence for knowing anything about the sexual status of Jesus’ mother.<sup>25</sup> Jesus raises the dead both in the Synoptics and in John, yet scholars usually do *not* infer from this independent attestation that such reports are historically true accounts of what Jesus of Nazareth actually *did*, but of what he was *thought* to have done—a big difference.<sup>26</sup> So too here: what our evidence tells us is that traditions about Jesus

23. On the “false witnesses” and in general on Luke’s tendency to distance Jesus from seeming to make threats against the temple, see Sanders 1993, 257–58.

24. The change of agency is required by John’s using this verse as a passion prediction. The oblique reference to resurrection as “rebuilding” also characterizes Mark’s verses, especially where he invokes “three days.”

25. The issue, of course, figures more prominently in Catholic treatments of the birth narratives than in Protestant ones. Traditions about Mary’s sexual status *after* Jesus’ birth are examined *à la loupe* in Meier 1991, 316–32; the classic study is Brown 1977.

26. On miracles generally, see Meier 1994, 509–1038, specifically on raising the dead, 773–873. The great hallmark of Meier’s project is rigorous critical consistency, and let the criteria of

predicting, perhaps threatening, the temple's destruction predate their appearance in these various postdestruction Christian texts.

Predate by how much? Do they go back to Jesus of Nazareth? Here again we must sort through the individual sayings and consider the date of composition for this literature generally. Which traditions predate the temple's actual destruction in 70? Appeal to criteria of authenticity help, but only to a degree. The predictions-as-threat (nos. 2, 6, and 7) might seem to pass not the criterion of multiple attestation (Luke displaced the Markan trial saying to Stephen's "trial" in Acts) so much as that of embarrassment. Jesus was understood to have threatened the temple's destruction. These post-70 writers, who for other reasons hold that Jesus will return, know full well that Jesus himself did not return in 70 to destroy the temple. Titus did that. Their disconfirmed older tradition, domesticated by being disowned, therefore might be authentic.<sup>27</sup>

Number 3, the Q-saying, seems a good candidate, since Q is generally held to have been assembled earlier than Mark, and the date of Mark's composition hovers around 70. But the saying itself, reminiscent of Jeremiah and Lamentations, comes in a context where Jesus delivers a sort of passion prediction, linking the city's impending rejection of him (it does not want to be gathered under his protective wings) with its own impending destruction.<sup>28</sup> This prediction thus seems after the fact—or, rather, after two facts: Jesus' death around 30 and the city's "death" in 70. Text 4 seems contoured fairly obviously in light of the war, a form of "prediction" that Luke also uses in 21:20 ("But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near").<sup>29</sup> Numbers 2 and 6, from Mark, by invoking "in three days," implicitly associate

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authenticity take us where they may. Thus his chapter on miracles points out again and again that whatever problems modern Westerners may have with the category "miracle," evidently no such problem afflicted the Evangelists, the people standing between the Evangelists and the original disciples, the original disciples, and even Jesus himself, *on the basis of the ubiquity and broad independent attestation* of traditions of Jesus as a miracle worker. Nevertheless, Meier carefully prescinds from pronouncing the actually historicity of traditions of Jesus' reviving the dead: "If the story does go back in some way to Jesus' ministry, then the possibility arises that a *belief* that Jesus raised the dead already existed among his disciples during his lifetime" (1994, 775; similar caution about John 11 and the raising of Lazarus on 831).

27. See esp. Sanders 1985, 71–76. For his reconstruction of Jesus' hearing before Caiaphas, in which Jesus' threat/prediction figure significantly, see 1993, 265–73.

28. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! *Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.* For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt 24:37–39//Luke 13:34–35). Luke immediately prefaces this passage with v. 33: "I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem," and his v. 35 lacks "and desolate."

29. See too Sanders's remarks, 1993, 256.



the temple's destruction/rebuilding with Jesus' crucifixion/resurrection; number 5, from John, does so explicitly. Here the destruction/rebuilding of the temple symbolizes (for those who know) the central christological drama. Can we realistically set these sayings, which broadcast such pellucid knowledge of Jesus' death or death-and-resurrection and of the city's siege and/or destruction, within Jesus' own lifetime?<sup>30</sup> They state so clearly what the early church believed: God, through Rome, had punished Jerusalem's Jews for their rejection of Christ; the true temple, Christ's body, *had* been raised in three days; and so on. Dissimilarity, too, is an imperfect criterion for establishing authenticity, but surely at some point it must come into play.

Of the eight sayings on our list, then, only Mark 13:2 and John 11:48, relatively unadorned by later christological concerns, have the best chance of fitting back into a context around the year 30. The Johannine passage attributes historically plausible sentiments to its characters. Indeed, like much else in John's handling of issues around Jesus' passion, this scene, unlike its Synoptic counterparts, is surprisingly unfrightened by theological concerns. The feared agent in the potential destruction, however, is not Jesus, but Rome.

Mark 13:2, likewise theologically spare and not tethered in any obvious way to later events or theological tropes, may be authentic. Jesus names no agent, but his pronouncement is clear. In favor of the authenticity of Mark 13:2 are three considerations (all carefully rehearsed and argued by Sanders): (1) Jewish apocalyptic literature on either side of Jesus' lifetime also speaks of the current temple's destruction and occasionally of its replacement by a superior, final temple. The existence of this motif enhances the possibility that Jesus, preaching the coming kingdom, may also have spoken in these terms. (2) Josephus provides secure evidence of an irrefutably genuine prophecy of the temple's and the city's destruction by another Jesus—Jesus son of Ananias—in the year 62 C.E. (*B.J.* 6.5.3 [300–303]).<sup>31</sup> So, not all predictions come after the fact. (3) Mark's prediction is

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30. Scholars will sometimes observe that, since Jesus was in a dangerous line of work (prophet, critic, etc.), it would not have been extraordinary for him to think that perhaps his life were in danger and for him to confide this concern to his immediate followers. True enough. But these sayings, characterized by precision, follow exactly the narrative line of what, in fact, does happen in the Gospels (Jesus' death and resurrection), and Jesus' closest followers, even in the Gospels, act totally bewildered once the final events unwind. On the passion predictions, see Fredriksen 2000b, 107–10.

31. Fredriksen 1999, 229–30. Meier, in his note on this incident, says, curiously, "By the time of Jesus ben Ananias, the situation in Judea and Jerusalem had deteriorated greatly; the final crisis and revolt were looming. Hence the tensions were much more severe" (2001, 647 n. 7). Evidently, he means to account for why Jesus of Nazareth, supposedly making such predictions, was not arrested, while Jesus ben Ananias was. Josephus, however, specifically says that in 62 "the city was enjoying profound peace and prosperity" (*B.J.* 6.300) Whatever the differences between the two Jesuses—and thus between the ways the authorities initially handled them (Jesus son of Joseph, ca. 30, continued to teach after making his prophecy; Jesus son of



not accurate in its details, the way inauthentic, *post factum* prophecies often are, because they can be. In point of fact, not *every* stone was thrown down; those of the retaining wall supporting the Temple Mount did and still do continue atop each other.<sup>32</sup>

Of the longer list of sayings, few emerge as strongly plausible candidates for a pre-70 date of origin. Furthermore, standard operating procedure when assessing a text's period of composition tends to diminish confidence in a predestruction date. Ordinarily, prophecies contained in an ancient text provide scholars with a rough *terminus a quo*, which is to say, *non ante quem*. Daniel's "abomination of desolation" is the clue to his writing *not earlier than* Antiochus IV's placement of his statue in the temple. By the same reasoning, the temple's destruction—linked as it is in so many ways in these stories to Jesus' death, or death and resurrection, and/or to the city's devastation—would itself be the source of evangelical predictions. If the prophecy of destruction, articulated clearly in Mark 13, is indeed after the fact, then the likelihood of that same prophecy's being encoded in Jesus' temple action—obscured by the Evangelists, but revealed by scholarly decoding—diminishes accordingly.

So far I have framed the question of Jesus' prediction, his action, and whether his action encoded his prediction, in terms of the stories and sayings in the Gospels and Acts. Straining these texts through the mesh of our various criteria of authenticity, I have argued, leaves us with no residuum securely datable to pre-70, or indeed to roughly pre-30. But before we leave this question, we still have one more source to consider: Paul.

Paul's letters antedate the Gospels by one or two generations. He is the only Christian author in our New Testament collection whom we know to have lived (and to have written) before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. He knew Peter, John, and probably others of the original disciples (Gal 1:18; 2:9). His instructions to his Gentile congregations on the impending arrival of God's kingdom—associated, in this postresurrection phase of the movement, with Jesus' glorious second coming—are a vivid and vital part of his gospel. The eschatological trajectory, which we can trace from the Baptizer through Jesus to Paul, fundamentally animates his message.

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Ananias, in 62, was arrested and flogged)—I doubt that a generalized prescience about the historical moment explains them: people in 62, again on the evidence of Josephus, did not know what awaited them four years down the line.

32. This last is Sanders's argument, 1993, 257; he also notes that Mark's prophecy—further tribute to its authenticity—fails to mention, specifically, fire, which features in Josephus's description. But in *B.J.* 6, although fire does figure prominently, what Josephus emphasizes is total devastation. From Josephus's eyewitness account, in other words, one still could not know that the retaining walls remained; Mark, not an eyewitness, can perhaps be excused. Also, even according to Josephus's account, Mark's Jesus foresaw accurately: none of the *buildings* on the mount remained standing.

Here is the problem. If Jesus had made such a spectacular prophecy (Mark 13:2) or had enacted it (11:15–18, as decoded by moderns) at such a key moment in his mission, if Paul were a colleague of the men who themselves must have known that prophecy (having been with Jesus in Jerusalem), and if Paul himself throughout his letters proclaimed the signs of the coming kingdom, *then why does Paul evince no knowledge of Jesus' prediction?*

Paul was an active apostle for close to thirty years. We have only seven undisputed letters from him.<sup>33</sup> Clearly he dictated more than seven letters in all that time. Thus, the greater part of his correspondence is lost—among which, for all we know, his definitive description of Jesus' action in the temple's court and his prediction of the temple's destruction.

Yet Paul's eschatological teaching represents tradition that, he himself claims, goes back to Jesus and to earliest *paradosis*.<sup>34</sup> In many places in the extant letters, where he informs his congregations on what to look out for as they await the returning Christ, Paul might easily and naturally have mentioned Jesus' teaching about the temple—had he known it. Somewhere after 1 Thess 4:15 (“For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord,” that first the temple will be destroyed as a sign that Christ is about to return; cf. Mark 13) or at Phil 4:5 (“The Lord is at hand! Once this temple is no more, as he said, it will be rebuilt in glory, at the End of the Age”) or somewhere in 1 Cor 15, where he reviews the sequence of events at the end. Or in Romans: in chapter 8, where he talks about the transformation of the universe and the signs that the saved await as they groan; after chapter 11, when all Israel and the full number of the Gentiles are saved; in chapter 15, when he speaks of the offering of the Gentiles that he is about to take to Jerusalem as if he were in priestly service “to this earthly temple which, as you know, will soon be no more, having been replaced by the glorious final temple of God.” But Paul says nothing of the sort. Anywhere.

Historical evidence from this period of the movement survives through happenstance, so we should not make too much of Paul's “silence” on this particular point. But neither can we ignore it. There are plenty of things in Paul's letters that the later Gospels do not have, and there are plenty of things the Gospels say about Jesus that Paul does not. But the eschatological traditions in Paul are his clearest, strongest link to the earlier movement around Jesus in both its pre- and postresurrection phases. It was on the basis of his conviction that God's kingdom was approaching—which he shared with the original apostles and, *mutatis mutandis*, with Jesus—that Paul and others like him dedicated themselves to a Gentile mis-

33. This paragraph and the next repeat what I have argued in 1999, 231.

34. Esp. 1 Thess 4:13–18, which Paul has “by the word of the Lord”; see also 1 Cor 15, which begins a list of witnesses to the risen Christ and then segues into a description of end-time events. See Fredriksen 1999, 74–154, for using Paul together with the Gospels to trace trajectories back to traditions from Jesus.

sion. It was on the basis of the movement's success in the Diaspora in turning Gentiles from idols to the God of Israel that Paul held Jesus to be God's "son ... descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3; see also 15:8–13).<sup>35</sup> If Jesus had predicted the temple's destruction as a sign of the end of the age, and if Paul himself spoke of such signs—including those which he has "by the word of the Lord"—then it is odd, very odd, that he evinces no knowledge whatsoever of Jesus' prophecies.

If the original context of those prophecies is post-70, of course, then it is not odd at all.

**What did Jesus do on the Temple Mount, and what did it mean?** Mark and John both seem to have inherited a story about Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers. They place the incident at radically different points in their respective stories, and each gives Jesus different lines to speak. For these reasons, I assume their independence. That is, I do not think that John read Mark and then decided to disconnect Mark's story about Jesus' action from events in Jesus' final week, bump the episode forward, change Jesus' speech—although not Jesus' point—and then heighten the drama by adding stampeding quadrupeds. Mark's Jesus quotes Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11; John's Jesus, stern and uncharacteristically direct, simply says, "Take these things away. You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade" (2:16). Though each Evangelist glossed Jesus' speech differently, both saw in the gesture the same meaning: Jesus condemned this getting and spending in the temple.

Sanders has argued, I think definitively, that the Evangelists' meaning is impossible to attribute to Jesus of Nazareth. We then have two historical possibilities: either the story of Jesus' action is authentic, and each Evangelist independently misinterpreted it, with individual variations, in the same way; or the story, despite being independently attested in Mark and John, is inauthentic; it does not go back to Jesus, and we may speculate on its origins as we will.<sup>36</sup>

I do not think that Jesus predicted the temple's destruction, and I doubt the authenticity of the action attributed to him in the temple. But even if traditions of Jesus' predicting the temple's destruction *were* authentic, this still would not help us to discern and establish the meaning of Jesus' action in the temple court—even if that, too, were authentic. Our evangelical witnesses make this point for us. Evidently Jesus' action (presuming that it happened) was so obscure that they, its most ancient publicists, completely misunderstood his meaning. Why else would they have so misconstrued it?

If Jesus actually *had* overturned the temple's tables, and if he actually *had* thereby intended to symbolize its destruction, then the Evangelists—and the human links in the chain of transmission that brought them this story—missed

35. For the full argument, see Fredriksen 1999, 119–37.

36. I suggest several possibilities in Fredriksen 1999, 229–30.

the point. Ostensibly inheriting two authentic predictions of destruction, they understood only one of them. They thereby also missed their opportunity to have Jesus' action state what they otherwise put forthrightly into his mouth, namely, that the temple's days were numbered. This prompts the question: If the significance of the gesture were so opaque and confusing to these later Christians—and especially to Mark, for whom the destruction of the temple is a major theme—how clearly could the crowds of Jesus' contemporaries have understood him? And how would the priests have become involved?

This connection between Jesus' action (as a prophecy of destruction) and the priests' reaction fuels most of the recent reconstructions of this part of Jesus' mission. It rests on Mark. Thinking with our literary evidence, as I attempted to do above, brings us to an impasse: we cannot settle questions of authenticity. How, then, can we close the gap between Jesus and the priests? Let us consider these traditions within a different sort of interpretive context. What was the physical environment within which Jesus' action putatively took place?

The circumference of the wall surrounding Herod's man-made mesa ran almost nine-tenths of a mile. The area it enclosed was enormous: approximately 169,000 square feet. Sanders in his vivid description translates the square footage of this space into more visualizable units: twelve soccer fields, stands and all, could be fit into this area. When necessary (as during the great pilgrimage holidays, especially Passover), it could accommodate perhaps as many as 400,000 pilgrims.<sup>37</sup> Around the perimeter of the outermost courts, protected from sun or rain by the *stoa* or the Royal Portico, the tables of those who sold could be found.

The very size of this place shrinks the significance of Jesus' putative gesture. But the precise circumstances of that gesture—during the days of mandatory purification between the eighth and fourteen of Nisan, in the week before the feast—makes the odds of its having a disturbing impact even less likely. Our visual imagination hampers us here: Gustav Doré set the stage for later cinematographers, and we effortlessly and customarily “see” this scene with dramatic clarity. A better visual analogy might be *The Fall of Icarus* (or *Where's Waldo?*). These courts, in this season, during this particular week, would have been jammed with humanity, tens of thousands of people. Imagine Jesus walking over to some of the vendors on the edges of this huge area and overturning their tables. Now ask yourself: How many people would have been able to see him? Those in his retinue and those standing immediately around him. But in the congestion and confusion of the holiday crowd, how many others could have seen what was happening, say, from twenty feet away? From fifty feet? Shrunk by the size of the temple's outer court, muffled by the density of the pilgrim crowds, Jesus' gesture—had he made it—would simply have been swallowed up. Herme-

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37. These figures come from Sanders 1992, 47–145. I hope that I do not appear ungracious in relying on his work to challenge his interpretation.

neutically inaccessible (on the evidence of the Evangelists), Jesus' gesture would have been visually inaccessible as well. What, then, on the basis of this gesture, did the priests have to worry about?

**The Gospel of John and the Death of Jesus.** The next point along the Markan trajectory is the questioning before the high priest. Various historians, following Mark, will argue that Jesus' gesture provided some sort of clue (whether to the high priest, the historian, or both) about what Jesus thought about himself. Often, it turns out, Jesus is revealed to have thought of himself as the Messiah—a messiah with a difference, but some sort of messiah nonetheless. Interpretations of his action in the temple are pressed into service to explain how he understands this role. Once the high priest realizes how Jesus conceives his own mission and message, he seals Jesus' fate: Pilate, and the cross, are the next stops on the way.

The problem with any of these speculations is not their plausibility or implausibility. Some reconstructions are more plausible, others (much) less so. Trying to figure out how Jesus looked at himself is a normal and legitimate historical question, no less or more exotic than trying to answer similar questions about other figures from the past. The problem with the introduction of this question at this juncture in his story, however, is the way that it confuses and distracts from the effort to attain a plausible answer to the question, Why did Pilate have Jesus (alone) crucified?<sup>38</sup>

This entire historiographical construction is driven fundamentally by the chronology of Mark's Gospel. That chronology in turn is driven by Mark's dramatic revelation of Jesus' christological identity, foreshadowed from chapter 8 on and expressed with high artistry in his presentation of Jesus' Sanhedrin trial. Christology is a central and appropriate concern of Christian theology. I think, both as an historian of Christian origins and as a student of ancient Christian theology, that historical Jesus research can and should matter to the way that modern theologians do their business.<sup>39</sup> But Jesus' christological self-identity (if

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38. "The precise reason(s) why Jesus' life ended as it did, namely, by crucifixion at the hands of the Roman prefect on the charge of claiming to be King of the Jews, is the starkest, most disturbing, and most central of all the enigmas Jesus posed and was" (Meier 2001, 646). Meier will argue in volume 4 that Jesus "toward the end of his life ... apparently also made symbolic claims to Davidic messiahship, an idea that some of his disciples may have harbored during the public ministry" (634). In light of the great lengths to which the Evangelists, variously, must go when proclaiming that Jesus is Messiah (more Davidic in the later Synoptics; less Davidic in Mark and John), I am skeptical. Specifically on the issue of Jesus and "Davidic Messiah," see Sanders 1993, 240–43. He notes, "It is unlikely that he did so [claim to be Messiah]: all the gospel writers so regarded him, but they could cite little direct evidence" (242).

39. On the questions, What does Jesus have to do with Christ? What does knowledge have to do with faith? What does history have to do with theology? see Fredriksen 2003. On the specific issue of historical Jesus research and modern Christologies, see Loewe 2000; likewise, Meier's concluding remarks 1999, 485–86.

he even had one) cannot account for his public, political crucifixion; so if we want to understand why he died as he did, we have to look elsewhere, which means that we have to free ourselves from the dramatic power of Mark's presentation. Here, thinking with John can help.

**1. John's narrative chronology.** Scholars have, in a general way, approvingly noted from time to time that John's presentation of Jesus making frequent trips back and forth to Jerusalem seems more likely than his going to Jerusalem, as an adult, only once for his final Passover. Various efforts are occasionally made to combine the two chronologies (Mark's and John's), so that one can be accommodated to the other. Some of these efforts occasionally correspond to more ambitious arguments—famously, those of Dodd and Robinson—that urge the superiority or greater antiquity of particular traditions that John preserves.

My argument is much simpler. I have little reason to think that John's chronology in its details is any more historically accurate than Mark's. But the *sort* of itinerary suggested by John helps to make sense of what else we know about Jesus. Pilate killed Jesus alone, and no one else. This fact implies that Pilate knew that Jesus was not dangerous in any way that a Roman prefect would worry about. Jesus was not advocating armed revolt; he was not fomenting tax rebellion; he was not encouraging resistance, defiance, or revolution. *Jesus was not dangerous, and Pilate knew it. The men around Jesus also were not dangerous, and Pilate knew this too.* The easiest way to explain Pilate's acquaintance with Jesus' nonthreatening message is the way that John's Gospel supplies. Jesus had repeatedly gone up to Jerusalem for the holidays—precisely when the prefect would have been there too—and proclaimed his message of the coming kingdom. He did so where he (naturally) would have found the largest audience: in the temple precincts (see John 18:20).

Thanks to Jesus' multiple trips to Jerusalem, Pilate—and the priests—would have known the content and tenor of Jesus' message well before the trip to the city that proved to be his last. This explains why only Jesus died—although it also means that, when he did die, his message, much less his view of himself cannot have been the precipitating factor leading to his execution.

**2. John's Christology** is so theologically developed and it so monopolizes his story that it, more than any other single factor, has prevented John's being regarded as a valuable source for reconstructing the historical Jesus. But by offering us this story, John provides us with a historiographically useful example to ponder. On the issues of Christology and the reasons for Jesus' death, John offers a reverse image of Mark, whose reticent, theologically closed-mouthed hero ends up dying on a cross precisely for his Christology.<sup>40</sup> John's christologically vocal Jesus, by contrast, dies for reasons of state.

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40. Keenly observed by Smith (2001, 218–19), who also mentions the problems caused by the flamboyance of the Johannine "signs" (201). Comparing Mark's and John's accounts,

John's chief priests fear that Rome, spurred by Jesus' mounting popular following, will take aggressive action against the nation. John's Jesus has no Sanhedrin trial, just a brief practical interview with Annas, who questions him "about his disciples and his teaching" (18:19). The reasons that the Fourth Evangelist provides for his priests' anxieties and the depiction he gives of his protagonist's hearing are, in contrast to the Synoptics, extremely nondramatic, parsimonious, and plain. They are intrinsically more realistic. This does not make them *eo ipso* more historical: verisimilitude by itself does not and cannot establish historicity.<sup>41</sup> But it does mean that, on these issues, the sort of picture that John gives is more plausible.

John's hypertrophied Christology floats far above his narrative while accounting for none of it; his Jesus and his priests do not even discuss it. Jesus' view of himself is not why the priests worry about him. In brief, John's Gospel demonstrates the irrelevance, even the unnecessary, of Christology as a factor in accounting, in a historically credible manner, for the priests' involvement in Jesus' death. The point is made compositionally by the way that John's very high Christology contributes so little to his plot (such as it is), and it is made narratively by the way that he positions Jesus' action in the temple in his story.

We could see the same thing by looking directly at Mark. Mark uses the action in the temple to set up the Sanhedrin trial, which in turn sets up the dramatic christological confession, thence Pilate, thence death. By having John as a counterstory to think with, we see much more clearly how plot-driven the Markan denouement is,<sup>42</sup> how Jesus' temple action serves basically to bring the priests on stage, and how the beautifully crafted, historically impossible Sanhedrin trial serves chiefly as a vehicle for christological proclamation. John helps us to see—if we are taken in by Mark's artistic power—that Christology simply is not a factor if we want to reconstruct a historically plausible reason why the priests would want Jesus out of the way.

What, then, of the historical Jesus? How does either of these stories, written some forty to sixty years after his death, help us to understand what happened in Jerusalem around Passover in the year 30? Here I would turn our attention to an aspect of Jesus' last week mentioned by both Mark and John: his entrance into the city not later than 8 Nisan, the week before the feast. Both Evangelists present Jesus as fêted into Jerusalem, acclaimed in messianic terms by enthused pilgrims: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!" (Mark 11:9–10); "Blessed is he who comes in the

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Smith notes that in the Fourth Gospel "the grounds for Caiaphas' recommendation and the Sanhedrin's condemnation are prudential rather than theological. In this fundamental way John differs from Mark's rendering, and in a non-Johannine direction" (221).

41. On verisimilitude, see D. Moody Smith 2001, 231.

42. For a similar argument from an utterly different starting point, see Burton Mack 1988.



name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). Then, again according to both Gospels, something curious happens: nothing.

Why not? How could any reasonably competent prefect let such a messianic demonstration pass? Why are the priests not on alert? Sanders (1993, 254) has proposed one answer: the demonstration, looming large in the Gospel stories, may actually have been inconspicuous, quiet, and small: "I can only suggest that Jesus' demonstration was quite modest. ... Perhaps only a few disciples unostentatiously dropped their garments in front of an ass, while only a few quietly murmured 'Hosanna.'"<sup>43</sup> The demonstration is so quiet that Jesus, so to speak, slips in under the radar; for Sanders, the temple action is what alerts the priests and begins the final stages of the drama.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps. With no better evidence, I would propose a different argument.<sup>45</sup> Once the floating story of Jesus' overturning the tables in the temple court is bracketed out, the same narrative structure for Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem emerges in both Mark and John. In both, Jesus progresses from the triumphal entry (where he is hailed as the harbinger of the messianic kingdom), to teaching in and around the temple in the days before the feast, to his secret arrest (he is so popular that the priests cannot risk arresting him openly), and thence to his death. Let us take the triumphal entry at face value: a loud, joyous, eminently visible demonstration of enthusiasm for the message (the kingdom is coming) and for the messenger (Jesus). Why did Pilate and Caiaphas *not* act? Because they knew from all his other trips to the city that Jesus perennially proclaimed the kingdom and that he expected God, not armies, to establish it. In brief, he is harmless, and they know it.<sup>46</sup> So, even after the triumphal entry—an unprecedented show of enthusiasm; the crowds have not acted like this before—Jesus

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43. Sanders 1985, 306, also 308: "I account for the fact that Jesus was not executed until after ... by proposing that it [the triumphal entry] was an intentionally symbolic act, ... [that] did not attract large public attention." David Catchpole, more radically, argues that the whole story is a fabrication (1984, 319–34).

44. While Sanders insists that the most immediate cause of Jesus' arrest by the priests was his prophetic demonstration in the temple, he leaves room as well for Caiaphas's knowing about the messianic acclamation that accompanied his entry into the city (1993, 265). Sanders also mentions that Caiaphas and Pilate must both have known that Jesus posed no military threat: "The solitary execution of the leader shows that they feared that Jesus could rouse the mob, not that he had created a secret army" (268). Sanders does not say how Caiaphas and Pilate could have known this; and his allegiance to the Markan chronology seems to foreclose the Johannine solution.

45. This section synthesizes my full argument and reconstruction in Fredriksen 1999, 235–66.

46. Independent evidence from the Gospels and from Paul converge on and confirm this point: Whatever Jesus' eschatological message promised in terms of God's justice ultimately being visited upon the wicked—and there is no shortage of predictions of that kind, neither in the Gospels nor in Paul—in the meantime, before the kingdom came, evil was to be met with



proceeds, as he always does, to teach to the holiday crowds in the temple. In the late 20s/early 30s, in Jerusalem, during a holiday, it is business as usual.

But within days Jesus will be dead on a cross: *not* business as usual. How is this particular trip to Jerusalem different? Those who follow the Markan chronology will answer: this year Jesus performs his prophetic action in the temple, and so on. I have argued against this reconstruction on several grounds: (1) insecurity about whether Jesus ever predicted the temple's destruction; (2) uncertainty about the significance and impact of the gesture at the temple; (3) dissatisfaction with the major question it cannot answer: Why death by *crucifixion*?

At this point I think that we should turn and face where the cross points us to: this same holiday crowd in Jerusalem. Most scholars attribute to the authorities a fear that Jesus' activities might result in riot; that concern accounts for his death. I agree. The precise reasons for this riot remain murky, although again Jesus' perceived threat to the temple, enacted prophetically in its courts, is mobilized to fill in the blanks. Why riot? Is it because his prophecy of destruction upset the crowd? Offended them? Inspired them?<sup>47</sup>

I speculate now. A straight line connects the mood and acclamation of the triumphal entry to the *titulus* on the cross. The identification of Jesus as "king of Israel" unites the two. Why would all these things have happened now? Had Jesus proclaimed *this* Passover as the last before the coming of the kingdom? The acclaim as he went into the city, the traditions about his resurrection that appear so readily after his death, his apostles' decision to remain in Jerusalem—all these point to an extreme intensity of eschatological expectation.<sup>48</sup> Had Jesus shifted his proclamation of the kingdom from "soon" to "now"? If so, who would have elided his proclamation to identify him as its king? Jesus himself is one possibility, although in my opinion an unlikely one. Could it be his immediate followers?

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nonresistance, the enemy loved rather than hated, injustice endured, vengeance eschewed. See Fredriksen 1999, 243–44, on the early movement's "interim passivism."

47. This sort of speculation—namely, that Jesus' action would have offended, excited, or electrified the crowds and that therefore, after his action, the priests knew that he posed a serious threat to public order—runs head on into the problems of hermeneutical and physical visibility. If the action were obscure enough that both Mark and John, independent of each other, misconstrued it, and if the Temple Court and the density of the crowd for all practical purposes drastically limited the number of people who could have seen what Jesus did (whatever they might have thought it meant), it is difficult to understand why, and how, the priests could have gotten so alarmed.

48. Once the movement penetrated the Diaspora, its unprecedented and socially disruptive decision to incorporate Gentiles into the *ekklesia*, by insisting that they give up their native religious practices but *not* convert to Judaism, is a further index of its eschatological conviction; see Fredriksen 1999, 125–37, 173–78.

Again, I think this unlikely: Jesus' charismatic mission would give them plenty of reason to think of him as a prophet, little to think of him as a king.<sup>49</sup>

The most likely candidates for those who identified Jesus as a Davidic sort of messiah on his last trip to Jerusalem are the pilgrim crowds. They are the ones least socialized to the pacifist tenor of his message; they provide the crowds milling about the city when "sedition is most apt to break out" (Josephus, *B.J.* 1.88). They also account most precisely for Jesus' mode of death. Had Pilate just wanted to do Caiaphas a favor, had both of them only been concerned to convince Jesus, or Jesus and his inner circle, that his messianic self-designation—wed, as they full well knew, to absolutely no sort of practical seditious intent or plan—was wrong, had they simply wanted to silence a popular figure whose preaching *might* lead to riot, then a quiet, off-stage murder/execution—exactly like Antipas's move against the Baptizer—would have sufficed perfectly well and risked less.<sup>50</sup>

But instead, Jesus was crucified. Crucifixion has a different social semiotics. Crucifixion is crowd control. It presupposes, indeed requires, a watching crowd as its context. (No audience, no reason to bother.) For that reason, it risks riot, presuming Jesus were so popular (Mark 14:2; John 12:19). But it is an elegant, simple, and powerful way to disabuse the crowds gathered for the holiday of their burgeoning messianic convictions. Jesus of Nazareth, Pilate announces emphatically though the cross, was *not* the king of the Jews.

#### 4. MESSIAH AND TEMPLE

I am out of evidence, and have been for a while. I offer the above reconstruction in the effort to get us to think a little more critically about the new orthodoxy regarding Jesus and the temple, to be more aware of the degree to which, *malgré tout*, we have all introjected Mark and his concerns, and to argue that John is useful historically, in many different ways, when trying to assemble the bits and pieces we have into a plausible picture of Jesus of Nazareth.

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49. Meier announces that in vol. 4 he will argue otherwise: "toward the end of his life, Jesus apparently also made symbolic claims to Davidic messiahship, an idea that some of his disciples may have harbored during the public ministry" (2001, 634).

50. The posse assembled to arrest Jesus, variously described in our different accounts, is armed: a mob sent from the high priest (Matt 26:47–56//Mark 14:43–49//Luke 22:47–53); a mixed group of Roman soldiers (σπειρα, usually "cohort," an implausibly large number of men for this mission) and officers from the chief priests (John 18:3–11). (The Gospels' μάχαира should be demoted from "sword" [RSV; Latin *gladius*] to "knife," unless we want to picture the LXX's Abraham poised to decapitate Isaac at the Aqedah, Gen 22:6.) Armed against whom, if the authorities, as I have argued and as Jesus' solo death in any case implies, know full well that Jesus and his immediate followers are nonviolent? Armed against supporters among the holiday crowds who, if they saw Jesus arrested, would put up a fight—the reason for stealth in the first place.

A preference for John's chronology—or, rather, a John-like chronology—over that offered by the Synoptics helps us to attain some explanatory purchase on the other data that we have about the early postresurrection movement and thus about Jesus' mission. It also helps us to attain some critical purchase on the consequences of appealing to Galilean regionalism and to noneschatological kerygmas when we look at this earliest period. John's Jerusalem-centered mission, often disregarded, has the undeniable virtue of conforming to what else we know about the postresurrection Christian movement, which was also Jerusalem-centered. These men might have hailed mostly from the Galilee, but once the community has dug in for the long haul (well, I doubt that they thought the haul would be all that long), the capitol became their home (Gal 1:18; 2:1; Acts *passim*; Josephus, A.J. 20.9.1 [200]). Within just five years of Jesus' death, evidence abounds for the widespread and rapid dissemination of his mission in its new phase. *Ekklēsiai* appear in the villages of Samaria and Judea as well as in the Galilee (Acts 8:1–4; 9:31; Gal 1:22; cf. John 11:18, Bethany in Judea); in Lydda and, on the coast, Joppa (Acts 9:32, 42) and Caesarea (Acts 10); farther north, in the Syrian cities of Damascus (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:10–22) and Antioch (Gal 2:11; Acts 11:20). For the movement's first generation, Jerusalem remained the hub, and it was from Jerusalem that they fanned out to bring "the word of the Lord" to the rest of Israel, and indeed to the world (Rom 15:19).

Scholars who concentrate on the undeniably Galilean roots of the movement see that northern region as its true matrix: the chief arena of Jesus' teaching and preaching and home to the Q-communities, who preserved or valued primarily the social teachings of Jesus, not stories about him. The origins of the Jesus movement, they say, bear the stamp of the Galilee religiously (in its supposed indifference or even hostility to temple-oriented purity rules), politically (it articulates the historic, independent Israelite identity vis-à-vis aristocratic, priestly Jerusalem), and sociologically (formed and based in small towns, it was intrinsically peasant and rural). Jerusalem, in this light, only *seems* important because of the theological emphasis of Luke's Gospel and Acts. Intensive regional studies of the Galilee are the best way, they argue, to understand the earliest and, in a sense, most authentic phase of the Jesus movement.

This orientation reflects the current scholarly preference for the Synoptic Gospels in historical Jesus research. It has served as well to give scope to those political, economic, and social theories that articulate tensions (imperial or colonial versus indigenous, aristocrat versus peasant, literate versus oral, city versus village) that some scholars have found useful to their reconstructions. It has spurred the growth of one of the great redactional marvels of our age, the Q-industry. It is a principled expression of the simple truth that the Galilee and Judea were two different regions with their own particular histories and traditions and with related but different political profiles, especially once Judea came under Roman rule while the Galilee retained its own Jewish ruler, client of Rome though he was.

Yes, Jesus himself came from the north. Yes, the Galilee doubtless played an important role in shaping his temperament, his thought, and his teaching. Yes, traditions in Mark and in Q still bear the stamp of that rural environment: in the narrative incidentals of the parables we still glimpse the world of village market-places and small farms. Yet acknowledging these things does not excuse us from making sense of all the data that we have from the early movement, which pull in a different, nonregionally specific direction—one that leads us, by many roads, to Jerusalem.

Put simply, the whole—Jesus' mission and message—is greater than its parts. Insisting on some sort of rural quintessence to the movement (whether pre- or postcrucifixion) only makes it that much harder to account for what we *know* to have been the case, for example, that Galileans routinely made the trip to Jerusalem for the holidays and that the temple was of no less concern to them than to their Judean cousins.<sup>51</sup> What we know—implied even in Mark; stated but not recounted in Luke; broadcast by John—is that Jesus during his mission had taught in Jerusalem more than once, probably repeatedly.<sup>52</sup> What we know is that, shortly after his death, his movement settled in Jerusalem and spread quickly in the two regions, Judea and the Galilee, in town and country both.

Like the Baptizer before him, then, and like his disciples after him, Jesus himself, I think, envisaged his message extremely broadly. He did not plot his course with individual regions or particular socioeconomic strata in mind. He entered into his sense of his own mission through John, by the Jordan in the south; he took his message north to the villages of his native Galilee, through the villages of Judea, and repeatedly also to Jerusalem, to the temple. He lived in the religious universe of the Shema, the covenant, and the prophets; the world of revelation, redemption, and realized promise encoded in the seasonal holy days of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. His mission was a mission to Israel, and his disciples, confirmed in that mission by their conviction that Jesus had been raised, continued to preach the coming kingdom to all Israel, spreading out from Jerusalem and eventually encompassing their known world.

This reconstruction of Jesus' broad conception of his own mission, articulated narratively in the Fourth Gospel by his routinely preaching to all Israel from the temple precincts during the holidays, coheres well with four *facts* that we know about his movement after his death: (1) Jesus' immediate followers at first

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51. On Galilean pilgrims to Jerusalem: rioting on Shavuot, after Archelaus's succession, see Josephus, *A.J.* 17.253; on the sit-down strike against Caligula's statue, hosted and supported by Galileans, *A.J.* 18.269–272; on Galilean pilgrims murdered in Samaria on their way to Judea and the territory-wide passions that incident inflamed, *A.J.* 20.119–136.

52. Jesus' instructions to his disciples on preparation for the Passover meal presupposed previous contact with people within the city (Mark 14:12–14); Luke's chief priests charge that Jesus "stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place [Jerusalem]" (Luke 23:5).

perceived, and then proclaimed, that he had been raised from the dead; (2) they settled in Jerusalem; (3) they took their message beyond territorially Jewish areas to Jewish communities in the Diaspora; and (4) once they encountered significant numbers of pagan Gentiles in those communities, they extended the mission to include them, too, without requiring that they convert to Judaism.

There is no historical fact that cannot be misconstrued by a trained professional. The misconstruals abound, some more obvious, some less so: resurrection stories are really ways of saying, "Gee, we really miss him." Jerusalem was not the place that mattered: those Q-villages up in the Galilee were the real powerhouse of the movement. Christian Jews, or maybe just the Hellenists as represented by Stephen, or maybe only Paul and a few of his immediate colleagues, are the first and only ones to come up with the novel or even revolutionary idea that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to participate in Israel's redemption. And so on.

But all these data—beliefs about resurrection, about the religious primacy of Jerusalem, about God's commitment to all Israel, about the inclusion of Gentiles *qua* Gentiles in Israel's final redemption—are native to ancient Judaism and, especially, to apocalyptic forms of ancient Judaism. Jesus himself was an eschatological prophet; the apocalyptic movement that formed around his memory and message was, to put it simply, an extreme form of Judaism. Some scholars have said that what Jesus taught and what earliest Christianity later preached has only a glancing relationship to each other. But I think that they are intimately, causally related, and I think that seeing the strong and coherent apocalypticism that unites this movement in all its phases—the Baptizer; Jesus; the post-Easter community; the Diaspora mission that also accommodates Gentiles—goes a long way in explaining why it was what it was.

John helps us here, too. Mark's narrative chronology reinforces and geographically expresses its peculiar christological theme of concealment and revelation; looked at in this light, I think that Jesus' itinerary ranks among the *least* historically reliable data that we can glean from Mark. John's chronology, too, betrays evidence of theological shaping, especially in the ways that certain of his Jesus' speeches or acts resonate with a setting in Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup> Still, for the historical reasons presented above, John's Gospel seems to offer surer ground, not necessarily

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53. Scholars have developed interpretive connections between the Johannine Jesus' speeches and their *mis-en-scène* in Jerusalem, as any commentary will point out. The clearest evidence I see for theologically motivated chronology is the way that John coordinates Jesus' death with the *Pesach corbanot* (19:14), moving the Jewish day of Jesus' death back from 15 Nisan (Mark) to 14 Nisan. Why? Elsewhere John presents Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:26, 35), and, in a burlesque ironic monologue, Jesus taunts his followers that, to live eternally, they will have to eat his flesh (6:51–60). The soldier at the crucifixion who does *not* break Jesus' legs acts in such a way "that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of him shall be broken'" (19:33, 36–37). The reference to Exod 12:46 makes explicit the connection between Jesus and other

in its details but in its overall presentation of a mission encompassing multiple trips to Jerusalem. Notoriously inattentive to the sequence of Jesus' movements,<sup>54</sup> distracted by its own very high, very noneschatological Christology, the Fourth Gospel allows us to glimpse a shape to Jesus' mission that coheres precisely with those eschatological images and patterns visible in so much of our other data. And, in a practical way, it solves the historical conundrum of Jesus' solo crucifixion and his intimates' continuing freedom. In short, for all the reasons assembled here, historians can and should see in John's Gospel a peculiar sort of *rosh pinah*: too long rejected, but a firm and true cornerstone for our work.

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lambs slain for Passover, and of course the Passover lamb is the only offering about which God gives explicit commands about eating. See Fredriksen 2000a, 68–70.

54. Famously, at the “bump” between 5:47 and 6:1, where Jesus goes from in the temple (evidently the setting of the discourse that begins in 5:19; cf. 5:14) to “the other side of the Sea of Galilee,” the *de rigueur* multitudes are already in tow.

## ON DEAL-BREAKERS AND DISTURBANCES

*Mark Allan Powell*

Professor Fredriksen finds that the Synoptic passion trajectory that moves from triumphal entry to temple incident to crucifixion creates some historical problems that can be resolved if the middle element is removed; thus, the Johannine chronology for the temple incident is preferable. The problems she finds with the Synoptic account of that event are basically threefold, as indicated by her summary statement (271): “(1) insecurity about whether Jesus ever predicted the temple’s destruction; (2) uncertainty about the significance and impact of the gesture at the temple; (3) dissatisfaction with the major question it cannot answer: Why death by *crucifixion*?” I am not persuaded that any of these three factors are “deal-breakers” with regard to the historical plausibility of the incident as it is recounted in the Synoptic Gospels.

### **Insecurity about whether Jesus ever predicted the temple’s destruction.**

Such insecurity depends on E. P. Sanders’s construal of the temple incident as embodying such a prediction. I see no necessary reason to read the accounts of the incident that way. It seems quite possible that the action was intended as a prophetic critique of the temple cult as currently practiced, with particular condemnation of its supposed implication that God prefers sacrifice to obedience (see 1 Sam 16:22) or to mercy (see Hos 6:6). Like many prophets before him, Jesus may have viewed the whole “business” of sacrifice as something of a sham when it took the place of true repentance.

Sanders argues that the Gospels’ portrayal of the temple incident as a “cleansing” rather than as a total condemnation is impossible. Jesus is presented as objecting not only to commercialism or exploitation but to the sacrificial system itself, which serves as the institution’s *raison d’être*. I must ask, when Amos brought Yahweh’s word, “Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them” (Amos 5:22), was he also predicting the destruction of the temple, attacking the rationale for its very existence? Or was he simply declaring God’s dissatisfaction with sacrifices that were offered in lieu of repentance?

Perhaps when Jesus tipped over a couple of tables in the temple court, he was saying, “God wants these sacrifices to cease!” Not *all* sacrifices such as might

ever be offered in this sacred place, but *these* sacrifices offered by those who view the temple not as a house of prayer but as a “house of trade” (John 2:16), that is, as a place of commerce, where the forgiveness of sins can be purchased by the unrepentant. The prophetic word that accompanies Jesus’ action in Mark 11:17 asserts this also: a “den of robbers” is a refuge for the wicked, a safe harbor for scoundrels who, after a respite, return to their misdeeds (robbers do not rob in their “den”; they flee to the den to avoid prosecution for their crimes, committed elsewhere). It is at least possible that Sanders misreads the symbolism of Jesus’ action by insisting on a chain of connections that would take the implications of the act to a logical extreme: Jesus turned over the tables of moneychangers; if money cannot be changed, then animals for sacrifice cannot be purchased; if no animals can be purchased, then no sacrifices can be made; thus, Jesus is attempting to shut down the temple cult *in toto*. This seems to make sense, but symbolic acts are not always intended to be taken to their logical extreme. It is at least possible that Jesus intended something much less intense: he was functioning as a prophet opposed to a particular *interpretation* of the sacrificial system (i.e., as crass commerce that allows one to avoid true repentance); as a prophetic act to illustrate this opposition, he tipped over the tables of a couple of moneychangers while quoting a line from a biblical prophet who probably would have agreed with him. Why moneychangers? Because those tables, where the actual buying and selling took place, seemed to illustrate the “crass commerce” aspect of the system especially well.

Such a construal is consistent with Jesus’ attitude toward the temple presented in various sayings: hypothetical approval of the temple for what it is supposed to be (and sometimes still is) but prophetic condemnation for what it often becomes. Thus, Jesus can be pleased with the scribe who recognizes that loving God and neighbor is “more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:32–34), without implying that such offerings and sacrifices are intrinsically or always worthless. Jesus can insist that reconciliation with a sibling should take precedence over offering gifts at the altar (Matt 5:23–24), without thereby suggesting that such gifts should never be offered at all (“first be reconciled, then come offer your gift”). Jesus can condemn fools who are more impressed by the temple’s gold than by what makes that gold sacred, yet by doing so he implies a certain respect for the temple as the dwelling place of God (Matt 23:16–21).

By way of analogy, we might consider the attitude of Jesus expressed toward what is depicted as “synagogue religion” in Galilee. Jesus is critical of a number of synagogal teachings and practices, but no one seems to assume that the prophetic acts he performs in violation of these (healing in a synagogue on a Sabbath; dining with excluded tax collectors and sinners; neglecting prescribed fasts and handwashings) were intended to close down the synagogues completely; much less are such acts read as a prediction that God would soon destroy all of the synagogues. This suggestion that there might be some analogy between how Jesus viewed the synagogues and how he viewed the temple cult derives support from



Matt 9:13 and 12:8. Here, he is twice reported as quoting Hos 6:6, a verse clearly intended to address the false priorities of the *temple* cult, as applicable to legal interpretations offered by *synagogue* leaders. The unavoidable implication is that either Jesus himself, or at least the First Evangelist, viewed the two institutions as not only analogous but as specifically analogous with regard to their failings (elevating “sacrifice”—not a bad thing in itself—to a position that eclipses the divine preference for “mercy”).

If “cleansing” is too weak a word for the temple incident, and if Sanders is right to interpret that event as a “prophetic act,” what happened there still does not need to be construed as a prediction of the institution’s absolute destruction. And if it is not so interpreted, then all of Fredriksen’s cogent comments as to why Jesus is unlikely to have predicted the temple’s destruction (the silence of Paul, the likelihood of *ex eventu* prophecy, etc.) become moot points—at least for our present conversation.

**Uncertainty about the significance and impact of the gesture at the temple.** I agree with Fredriksen’s suggestion that the “gesture” at the temple was probably no big display. I do not accept her assumption that a relatively small, localized gesture would not have resulted in execution of the person who performed it—especially if that person was viewed as posing some kind of (even minor) threat to the public order. Indeed, this seems to provide the best response to the query that puzzles Fredriksen throughout: Why weren’t Jesus’ followers hunted down after his crucifixion? Perhaps an isolated act of vandalism, while punishable by death, did not carry sufficient “significance and impact” to warrant indictment of the perpetrators’ colleagues. This brings us to the next point.

**Dissatisfaction with the major question it cannot answer: Why death by crucifixion?** Such dissatisfaction assumes knowledge of (stable) policies regarding crucifixion that I think eludes us. Was crucifixion only reserved for extreme cases—a penalty for presumed treason? The Romans appear to have crucified thousands of people—were they *all* would-be messiahs and/or persons who were viewed as serious threats to Caesar’s authority? We have one bit of data from the biblical record to indicate otherwise: the two persons Mark 15:27 calls “robbers” (ληστές). What does that mean? Some have sought to associate these robbers with social bandits involved in some sort of private war against Roman imperialism. Perhaps, or maybe they were just pickpockets or shoplifters. I am not trying to be facetious—the point is we honestly do not know what crimes these individuals had committed that were deemed guilty of death by crucifixion. Notably Mark does not call Barabbas a “robber,” and, although John does (John 19:1), he avoids using that term for the two who are crucified with Jesus—in neither tradition are Barabbas and Jesus’ companions on crosses linked, although Luke refers to the latter as “criminals” (κακούργοι, Luke 23:32).

What did it take to get crucified in Jerusalem during a high and holy day? Did stealing (on the Temple Mount itself, during the sacred festival) become a capital offense? What about turning over tables of moneychangers? Suppose the

persons who did such things were “nobodies,” a couple of vagrants or a peasant from Galilee? I do not find it hard to believe, as John Dominic Crossan suggests, that Caiaphas and Pilate could have had a standing agreement that “action was to be taken against any disturbance and that some examples by crucifixion might be especially useful at the start” (1994, 152). Nailing a couple of thieves and a vandal to crosses outside the gate would serve as a suitable reminder to others that they had better behave themselves.

Unlike Crossan, I see no need to dispense with the skeletal outline of arrest and trials to which the biblical record attests. Jesus may very well have performed his “gesture” in the temple court on that final visit to Jerusalem, as the Synoptic tradition suggests. Perhaps he had done this before, at other feasts, hence John’s chronological placement of the event; there is no necessary reason to assume that a prophet would perform an illustrative prophetic act only once, and if indeed the act was no big spectacle, there is no necessary reason to assume he could not have done something like this repeatedly and gotten away with it. In any case, it is not hard to believe that *this* time he did not get away with it. Maybe a soldier or a priest was on hand and saw him. Maybe one of the vendors filed a complaint. At any rate, a council of priests issued a “warrant” and sent out a party to bring him in for questioning. Perhaps they paid off one of his followers to help find him. He was arrested, and the hearing did not go well (either because he refused to speak or because he saw it as an occasion to present his prophetic message). The rump council of priests sent him over to Pilate who (with or without actually interviewing him) signed a death verdict. Then, Jesus was hauled out to be crucified along with a couple of others who had disturbed the peace.

This does not explain everything (why the *titulus*? I don’t know—maybe a mocking soldier prepared it after someone in the crowd made some claim about their prisoner), but it does make basic sense historically, while accepting at least the Synoptic account and, potentially, *both* the Synoptic and Johannine accounts of these events. If we ask why John does not link the crucifixion to the temple incident, it could be that he was interested (appropriately) in the bigger picture. The real problem—according to John—was Caiaphas’s policy that viewed letting an innocent person die as preferable to risking a disturbance that could cause the whole nation to perish (John 11:50). So John focuses on this generic “sacrifice justice to keep peace” mindset rather than on the specific application of that mindset with regard to the temple incident. At any rate, both traditions (Mark and John) can be read in light of such an understanding without major contradiction. And as for that pesky question—Why was Jesus crucified but his followers were not hunted down?—the answer might be just this simple: no one thought he was important enough to justify such extravagance. I doubt that they bothered to hunt down the associates of those two robbers, either.

**So what about the triumphal entry?** Here is where I think Fredriksen’s proposed reconstruction falters on its own logic. She supposes that Caiaphas and Pilate were both acutely aware of Jesus: he had been there before and they were

watching him. She accepts the triumphal entry account “at face value” as a grand and obvious public display. Apparently, it was so grand that it got some of the crowd worked up into attributing messianic status to Jesus, hence the crucifixion.

I see two problems with this construal. (1) Why must the entry be regarded as a “big display,” while the incident with the tables is but an isolated “gesture”? The same logic Fredriksen uses for downsizing our image of the latter event could apply to the former. I picture a ragtag band of Galileans entering the city with Jesus on a donkey and someone quoting from Zechariah while most of the city went about its business and ignored them. It was another symbolic prophetic act—important to the handful of people involved but irrelevant to everyone else. There is no reason to assume that Caiaphas or Pilate would have even heard about it, although it is possible (again) that a complaint was filed. If that were the case, then the temple incident (following Synoptic chronology) would constitute a *second* mark against Jesus, which might make crucifixion for what seems (to us) a minor offense more likely. Jesus could have been sentenced to that most heinous form of death not because anyone thought he posed a serious threat to the Roman Empire but because he was a persistent pest who had been involved in two minor disturbances in two days. Even then, however, I suspect that the offense conducted on the Temple Mound itself—and the one that involved some display of force—would have been decisive for earning the death sentence.

(2) If Jesus truly were crucified as someone who was known to Pilate and as someone who had been acclaimed by large crowds as a messianic pretender, how reasonable is it to assume that Pilate would have allowed his family and followers to set up camp in Jerusalem itself and to operate unmolested for the remaining six years of his governance? Fredriksen’s claim is that *only* Jesus was crucified because Pilate knew he was harmless and only wanted to send a message to the enthusiastic crowd. Okay, but then what would he have done when it became obvious that this message had not been received, that his followers were more enthusiastic than ever, proclaiming Jesus the Messiah as risen from the dead, calling him their true Lord, and actively recruiting others to join them? At *that* point, would he not have acted? The better assumption, I think, is that Pilate did not act against the followers of Jesus because they were not significant enough in numbers or influence to attract his attention. He took no notice of them. This simple suggestion not only resolves the problem Fredriksen’s proposal seeks to solve (why Jesus’ followers were not *immediately* hunted down) but also deals with the further problem that her proposal cannot explain (why they were not *eventually* hunted down). It depends, however, on a different starting assumption, for if Fredriksen is right that Pilate had been highly attentive to Jesus and viewed him as a serious threat to the state, then it does not make much sense to assume he would not have been vigilant with regard to the man’s followers. He *would* have taken notice of them and of the burgeoning messianic movement they were encouraging.

Fredriksen is right in saying that if the triumphal entry caused Pilate to take considerable notice of Jesus as one who was being hailed as a messiah, we must ask why his followers were not also eradicated. Her suggestion that Pilate knew they were harmless is satisfactory only in the short term. If, however, the triumphal entry (like the temple incident) was only a small affair, it may follow that Pilate took virtually no notice of Jesus, that he simply had him killed as a random, vagrant troublemaker, and that, perhaps, he did not even know the man had followers. In my mind, this suggestion (which allows for the Synoptic placement of the temple incident) provides a suitable alternative answer to the questions Fredriksen has so astutely raised.

In sum, I suggest that it is possible to answer those questions this way. (1) *Why was Jesus crucified?* Because in the minds of people like Caiaphas and Pilate he was an expendable peasant who had caused a disturbance among important people at a festival. (2) *Why was just Jesus crucified?* Because in the minds of people like Caiaphas and Pilate he was *just* an expendable peasant who had caused a disturbance among important people at a festival (i.e., he was not viewed as posing any kind of threat sufficiently serious to warrant further attention).

These explanations allow for the “disturbance” Jesus caused to be identified with a small-scale temple incident analogous to what is reported in the Synoptic Gospels—or, indeed, with a small-scale “triumphal entry” *plus* a small-scale temple incident analogous to what is reported in the Synoptic Gospels.

## PART 5: CONCLUDING MATTERS

In reflecting upon the impressive contributions of the above essays, some comment deserves to be made as to the patterns that may be emerging, as well as further work yet to be done. In noting similarities and differences among the essays, Paul Anderson draws out several common threads and raises other questions for further investigation. One of those questions relates to what sort of outcome might be anticipated from this sort of investigation. In the second appendix after his essay above, Anderson presents for discussion a sketch of at least one means of envisioning a nuanced analysis of the issues, considering what a view of Jesus “in bi-optic perspective” might look like. Reflecting upon the above essays, however, Anderson notes several points of convergence that may provide critical ways forward in the assessment of issues related to John, Jesus, and history.

Finally, Felix Just, S.J., points the way forward in terms of what the next series of investigations might entail within the John, Jesus, and History Project—inviting also reflection and engagement beyond it. As creator of the Johannine Literature website (<http://catholic-resources.org/John/>) and moderator of the Johannine Literature listserve, Just has served Johannine studies well over the years and was part of the original group (along with Thatcher and Anderson) who conceived the John, Jesus, and History Consultation. Here his posing of the metaphor of time-travel helps us think about the historicity question again, not only regarding the distant past, but also with reference to present-day considerations. That being the case, Just describes well the plans for the next six years of investigations, which will be collected in the next two volumes in the John, Jesus, and History Project.



## GETTING A “SENSE OF THE MEETING”: ASSESSMENTS AND CONVERGENCES

*Paul N. Anderson*

As the above essays show, the subjects of John, Jesus, and history make a combustible combination! Indeed the surveys and treatments of the issues demonstrate how the historicity of John and thus John's contribution to the quest for Jesus has been one of the most intensely debated religious subjects in the modern era. The problems involved, however, are not imaginary; they are real. John *is* very different from the Synoptics, while at the same time similar to them in nonidentical ways. John's presentation of Jesus *is* the most elevated of all the canonical Gospels, yet it also poses the lowliest and most subordinated presentations of Jesus. In addition to theological emphases and symbolic presentations of persons and events, John is *also* chock full of mundane details and historical realism—and some of John's presentation *does* seem more plausible than Synoptic ones. These are valid reasons for John's historicity being questioned—and defended—with rigor and passion. That being the case, is there any hope for a “sense of the meeting” among scholars?

In a critical assessment of critical views, extreme claims for or against John's historicity are problematic. Therefore, solutions arguing John's patent ahistoricity, akin to those who have argued John's supra-historicity, bear extensive critical liabilities as well. That being the case, the programmatic exclusion of John from eligibility in all Jesus studies is itself less than adequate critically. Whether John is different from the Synoptics or similar, elevated in perspective or mundane, rhetorically oriented or reflective, late or early, dependent or autonomous, the predominant stance has been uniform: the Fourth Gospel and historicity do not mix. Further, whether the criteria for determining historicity constructed upon the Synoptic model discriminate against John, or whether modern portraits of Jesus cohere with John's independent witness, the prevalent critical practice has been to truncate John from Jesus studies. These “solutions” to real problems, however, create new critical problems of their own. On this point all of the above studies are in basic agreement.

While the above analyses approach their subjects from disparate viewpoints using different methodologies, several impressions converge upon reflection. First, John's particular *type of memory, witness, and historiographic project* deserves to be analyzed in its own right instead of being a stepsister to the Synoptics (Thatcher, Anderson, Kysar, Powell, Smith, Conway). The Fourth Gospel's distinctive features likely reflect a different sort of process and development than its Synoptic counterparts, so finding ways of analyzing those particular phenomena is a crucial task of scientific investigation. New criteria for determining historicity in John deserve to be explored, at least alongside those that have served Synoptic investigations of Jesus. In addition, cognitive-critical methodologies may serve the analysis of Gospel traditions as a complement to other critical methodologies in noting the dialogue between experience and perception in the origin and development of traditional memory. Far too many exclusions of traditional material result from the failure to appreciate human factors in the development of Gospel traditions. Perhaps a new disciplinary approach to the human and experiential factors inherent to the developing of memory and tradition will provide a set of critical ways forward.

Second, *ways of conceiving what "history" is* with reference to the Johannine witness is an important task as well, both in its originative and developing ways (Kysar, Smith, Conway, Painter, Fredriksen). From a new historicist perspective, the question of "whose history" may pose a way of getting at the differences and similarities between the Johannine and Markan Gospels (including there Matthew and Luke). Indeed, John's alternative perspective *may* reflect ignorance of other traditions, but not necessarily so; it may be intentional and dialectical. This interest will be affected, of course, by inferences as to the developing history of the Johannine situation, which must be considered in longitudinal perspective, not simply as a reality that began after 70 C.E. The tension here will involve holding both levels of history together—originative and developing histories—and analyzing each to the benefit of the other, rather than its exclusion. Therefore, the conjunction of history *and* theology must be maintained, rather than allowing disjunctive inclinations—history *or* theology—to distort critical inquiry.

Third, a notable fact in the above approaches is the *apparent departure from source-critical analysis* in the addressing of the Johannine riddles by the present selection of interpreters (esp. Anderson, Kysar, Smith, Van Belle). Three decades ago various aspects of Bultmann's diachronic legacy would have featured prominently in such a study, and while some scholars may still be working with source-critical hypotheses, these appear to feature less prominently in the sorts of approaches that present scholars are taking. This could be a factor of the notable rise of rhetorical and new literary studies following the impact of Alan Culpepper's book nearly a quarter century ago (1983). Or, it could reflect a renewed interest in the stylistic unity of the text, despite a general consensus that the Fourth Gospel as we have it may have been revised at least once. This is not to say that the Johannine Evangelist did not make use of other sources; it is simply to point out that



scholars today are generally less confident in their ability to identify such sources within the text of the Fourth Gospel. The implications for historicity, however, are that rather than John's being considered a derivative, late piece only, the Johannine tradition appears to have its own voice and perspective, which may be a resource worth considering in any adequate investigation of the Jesus of history.

Fourth, *John's relation to the Synoptics* continues to feature strongly as an issue that has a significant bearing on any discussion of John, Jesus, and history. Notably, however, there appears to be something of a softening of the dividing lines between opposing positions. Among scholars arguing John's basic independence from the Synoptics (Anderson, Kysar, Smith), however, there is some room for inferring dialogical engagement with Synoptic traditions, the Markan tradition in particular. Also serviceable may be the consideration of particular types of intertraditional engagement between John and different traditions, even at different times (and forms) within their respective developments. Such investigations will involve some speculation, but they may also account for particular aspects of what were more likely *several sets and types of relationships* better than sweeping theories about *the* relationship between John and the Synoptics, theories tending to be devoid of nuance. Likewise, from the Synoptic-dependence side (Van Belle, Lincoln), we see a clarification that John's purported reliance on Synoptic traditions was not the sort of direct dependence more readily inferred by Matthew's and Luke's more apparent uses of Mark. This, of course, is what C. K. Barrett (1978) was saying all along, but the clarification in the above essays is helpful. The point is that, if such intertraditional engagements were conceived more dialogically, movement toward a broader consensus on the Johannine-Synoptic question might yet be possible.

Fifth, fresh considerations of the *history-theology relationship* in new perspective also emerge from the above investigations (esp. Thompson, Painter). Many of the above essays note the misappropriation of Clement's somatic/pneumatic distinction between the Synoptics and John, and critical flaws in the "theology *versus* history" dichotomy have been noted from various perspectives. Just as the new quest for the historical Jesus emerging six decades ago sought to re-envision Synoptic-historicity studies—given the religious character of Gospel material—a similar re-envisioning of the Johannine tradition is called for today. Yes, much of John *is* theological, but this does not totally preclude historicity of origin. It is also a fact that a historical event or memory may be crafted symbolically or theologically—indeed, the most historic and momentous of events *always* are—so the inference of the latter cannot be taken as a measure of the former. Taking into account Johannine paraphrase, earlier-later reflections within its tradition, and the rhetorical functions of narration, these clear features of John's theological work deserve to be engaged scientifically as direct features of historiographic investigation, rather than disregarded as alien to it.

Sixth, a call for *interdisciplinary investigation* comes through clearly from several of the above essays (Kysar, Carson, Conway), and this is a challenge

for Johannine and Jesus scholars alike. As the third quest for Jesus opened up Gospel-tradition historiographic analysis to the social sciences, the interdisciplinary approaches here deserve to be applied with a special focus on what they might look like for Johannine studies. With interests in new historicism and more sustained advances in the new literary criticism within Johannine studies, new insights and questions have already brought a fresh set of critical perspectives to the field. Likewise, attention to methods of characterization and the rhetorical strategies of the text are relevant to historical narratives as well as to novelistic fiction. As Carson notes, however, the question is whether scholars can approach the Johannine literature and its burgeoning disciplines conjunctively instead of disjunctively. The way forward here will likely be to learn all that can be learned from particular disciplines without allowing a single approach to eclipse the others. For instance, knowledge about the history of the Johannine situation need not displace knowledge about the earlier tradition; likewise, correctly inferred rhetorical analyses cannot in themselves account for the originaive history of traditional material. Therefore, acknowledging how a particular disciplinary approach fits into the large mix will be a central feature of interdisciplinary advances in understanding what Gail O'Day (1986) refers to as John's narrative mode and its theological claims. Since parts of those claims include references to historicity, the question is how such assertions also relate to understanding more clearly John's narrative development and rhetorical function.

Seventh, a *more nuanced approach to Jesus studies* is called for by nearly all of our contributors. Notably, however, despite the critical assessments of critical views, *none* of the above essays calls for a Johannine overturning of the Synoptic witness. They all, however, ask what place the Johannine tradition might have at the table for the most adequate of Jesus studies to be advanced in the future. While the first three quests for the historical Jesus have at least one thing in common—leaving the Fourth Gospel *out* of the mix (Verheyden, Powell, Fredriksen)—one wonders what a new quest (a fourth quest?) might look like with John *in* the mix, and centrally so (Anderson, Thompson, Smith). Not only would this lead to a new day in Johannine studies, but it would certainly stir up the waters within Jesus studies as well. This might be upsetting to some Jesus research, but if a place can be found for Thomas, why is John left out? Gospel and Jesus studies alike would be well served by critical analyses of how John and the Synoptics together contribute corroborative and coherent perspectives on Jesus, the sorts of ways the Synoptic presentations are more plausible, and also what sorts of ways the Johannine presentation of Jesus might be more plausible.

Indeed, a fresh investigation of the Johannine tradition not only might have implications for Johannine studies but might also render a new set of keys for unlocking some of the Synoptic riddles and Jesus-studies conundrums. If the Markan project were a compilation of traditional pericopes, and if Mark served as a basis for Matthew and Luke, is its order a strict chronology or a general one? If the Johannine narrator was familiar at least with Mark, might John's differences

be a direct factor of familiarity and augmentation rather than a historiographic scandal? While the Synoptics convey a good deal of historical perspective on the ministry of Jesus, might not John also do the same as an alternative perspective? Yet all four canonical traditions are also highly theological, so finding ways of analyzing this material for what it is continues as a critical challenge. What the above studies suggest is that, in the investigation of John, Jesus, and history, critical assessments of critical views consolidate the best advances of the past while at the same time raising new critical questions for the future. This calls for a more sustained focus on aspects of historicity in John and a fresh look at Jesus through the lenses the neglected Gospel avails.



## EPILOGUE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

*Felix Just, S.J.*

Those seeking simple solutions or definitive answers to the historical questions or literary issues surrounding the Fourth Gospel may be disappointed by the essays in this volume. The above essays—most of which are lightly edited versions of papers originally presented at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature between 2002 and 2004—have more often raised questions than provided answers. In some cases they have even raised obstacles or objections against the type of endeavor that some imagine when they hear about “historical” investigations about Jesus, the Gospels, and early Christianity. On the other hand, for those seeking a deeper understanding of Jesus and the early church in general, or of Johannine Christianity in particular, the essays in this volume have provided deeper insights into the complexity of the problems and the inadequacy of many previously proposed solutions.

Contrary to some people’s expectations, it is not the intention of the John, Jesus, and History project to provide definitive answers about the composition history of the Fourth Gospel, nor is the goal to “prove” the historical accuracy or inaccuracy of particular Johannine accounts. As well as being impossible, knowing how to do so is not entirely obvious. Rather, the primary goal of this venture is to bring John’s Gospel back into the scholarly conversation about the historical Jesus, to restore it to its rightful position among the various other sources that scholars regularly consider in their investigations of the historical questions surrounding Jesus and the early Christian movement. The impact such a convergence may make is itself unforeseen.

For many decades, ever since scholars recognized that Mark was most likely the first written Gospel, they have also assumed or asserted that it was the most historically accurate. Thus, scholars have often employed Mark as the primary source for reconstructing the life and teachings of the historical Jesus. The use of Mark’s Gospel (especially of its chronological framework) by both Matthew and Luke was seen as reinforcing the historicity of Mark, in contrast to the more obviously “theological” or “spiritual” nature of John’s Gospel. More recently, however, most scholars have been willing to admit that the Synoptic Gospels (not to mention the later noncanonical Gospels) are no less “theologically” biased than

the Fourth Gospel is. As a corollary, more and more scholars now also recognize that John may contain some older material at its core that may be just as historically valuable as the Synoptic traditions, maybe even more so, in some respects. Thus, there is no longer any good reason, if there ever was, to leave the Fourth Gospel out of consideration in discussions of historical issues surrounding the life of Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity.

Yet how can we move forward in our attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the ancient world and the biblical texts that emerged within it? Further archaeological discoveries might increase our knowledge of certain facts about ancient Israel and early Christianity. Recovering additional ancient manuscripts might also allow us to solve some textual and socioreligious issues. Some people might even wish that we had access to a time-travel machine to journey back to the first century. Even that, however, would not really solve some of the basic, underlying Johannine- and Jesus-studies problems.

Imagine for a moment that we could travel back in time: To what part of the ancient Mediterranean world and to what point in time should we go? Should we go to Ephesus late in the first century or to Jerusalem at the time of Jesus? What would we wish to see, and whom would we want to interview? Would we seek out the Fourth Evangelist or the “disciple whom Jesus loved” or the “elder” of the Johannine letters or John the son of Zebedee—to ask which of them wrote all or part of the Fourth Gospel? Or would we rather go to Jerusalem, maybe to the Pool of Siloam to find out if, when, and how a blind man received his sight, or to the Temple Mount to learn exactly when and what kind of a ruckus Jesus caused there?

Even if we could travel back in time, we would not be discovering raw, unadulterated facts, as though such were ever the sole measure of historicity. All of our own observations would inevitably remain subjective and thus affected by our own biases. Even if we tried to be completely objective as observers, relying only on what we ourselves “have seen and heard,” or perfectly neutral journalists, interviewing other people and carefully recording what they told us, everything we witnessed would still inevitably be interpreted through our own conceptual categories and expressed in our own words (see 1 John 1:1–4). History is simply not as objective, neutral, or factual as some people naively assume. Just as the German word *Geschichte* means both “history” and “story,” so we must also constantly be aware that there is no such thing as starkly factual history that is not already expressed and interpreted through perception, through language, through story, through words. Thus, just as the four Gospels have significantly different accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus, so also the accounts of anyone who traveled back in time to observe the life of Jesus, or to interview the Fourth Evangelist, would differ from other such accounts. They would all, in a sense, be faith statements no less than John or Mark or the other Gospels, even if some of today’s observers might rely more upon scientific inferences of historical faith than upon experiential interpretations of religious faith. In the same way, new

archaeological and textual discoveries would not by themselves provide any new answers but would add to the pool of evidence that would need to be interpreted in our attempts to understand better the meanings of biblical texts. All four of the canonical Gospels are faith statements—neither completely factual nor wholly fictional—but they are also historically based interpretations of the significance of Jesus within people's lives.

Although some people in the modern world still seek objective facts as the sole measure of history, others with a postmodern perspective question the possibility of attaining any historical certainty that is not also imbued with subjective engagements. A better approach would be to continue our attempts to understand more fully the complex interrelationships between history and story, truth and faith, text and interpretation, the past and the present.

It is in that spirit that the work of the John, Jesus, and History project moves forward, the results of which will hopefully be published in subsequent volumes of this Symposium Series. In 2005–2007, the focus of the group's work is on various aspects of historicity in certain pericopes or sections of the Fourth Gospel (John 1–4; 5–12; and 13–21, respectively). The following three years (2008–2010) will consider more explicitly what contributions the Johannine materials might make to the study of the Jesus of history, with particular interests in how the Johannine lens might afford a fuller understanding of his passion and death, his ministry and works, and his teachings and words. In pursuing this endeavor, it is not expected that all of the invited or contributed papers will argue positively for the greater historical reliability or factual accuracy of the Johannine accounts vis-à-vis their Synoptic counterparts. Yet each contribution will address various issues of historicity in some way, positively or negatively, so that the potential contributions of the Fourth Gospel may be understood and appreciated ever more deeply.





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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Paul N. Anderson** is Professor of Biblical and Quaker Studies at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

**D. A. Carson** is Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

**Colleen Conway** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

**Paula Fredriksen** is the Aurelio Professor of Scripture at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts.

**Felix Just, S.J.**, is an Associate Director of the Loyola Institute for Spirituality in Orange, California.

**Robert Kysar** is the Bandy Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Homiletics at the Candler School of Theology of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Andrew T. Lincoln** is the Portland Professor of New Testament at the University of Gloucestershire in Gloucestershire, England.

**John Painter** is the Foundation Professor of Theology at Charles Sturt University in Canberra, Australia.

**Sydney Palmer** is a doctoral candidate at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

**Mark Allan Powell** is the Robert and Phyllis Leatherman Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio.

**D. Moody Smith** is the George Washington Ivey Professor Emeritus of New Testament at the Divinity School of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

**Tom Thatcher** is Professor of Biblical Studies at Cincinnati Christian University in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Marianne Meye Thompson** is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

**Gilbert Van Belle** is a Professor in the Biblical Studies Section of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University of Leuven in Leuven, Belgium.

**Jack Verheyden** is the Richard Cain Professor of Theology and Ecclesiology Emeritus at the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California.

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